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THE HARD MUSIC MAGAZINE

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Cool Hand Luke
36 Crazyfists
Anberlin
Lost Ocean
Life In Your Way
Readers' Poll Winners

MAYLENE AND THE SONS OF DISASTER

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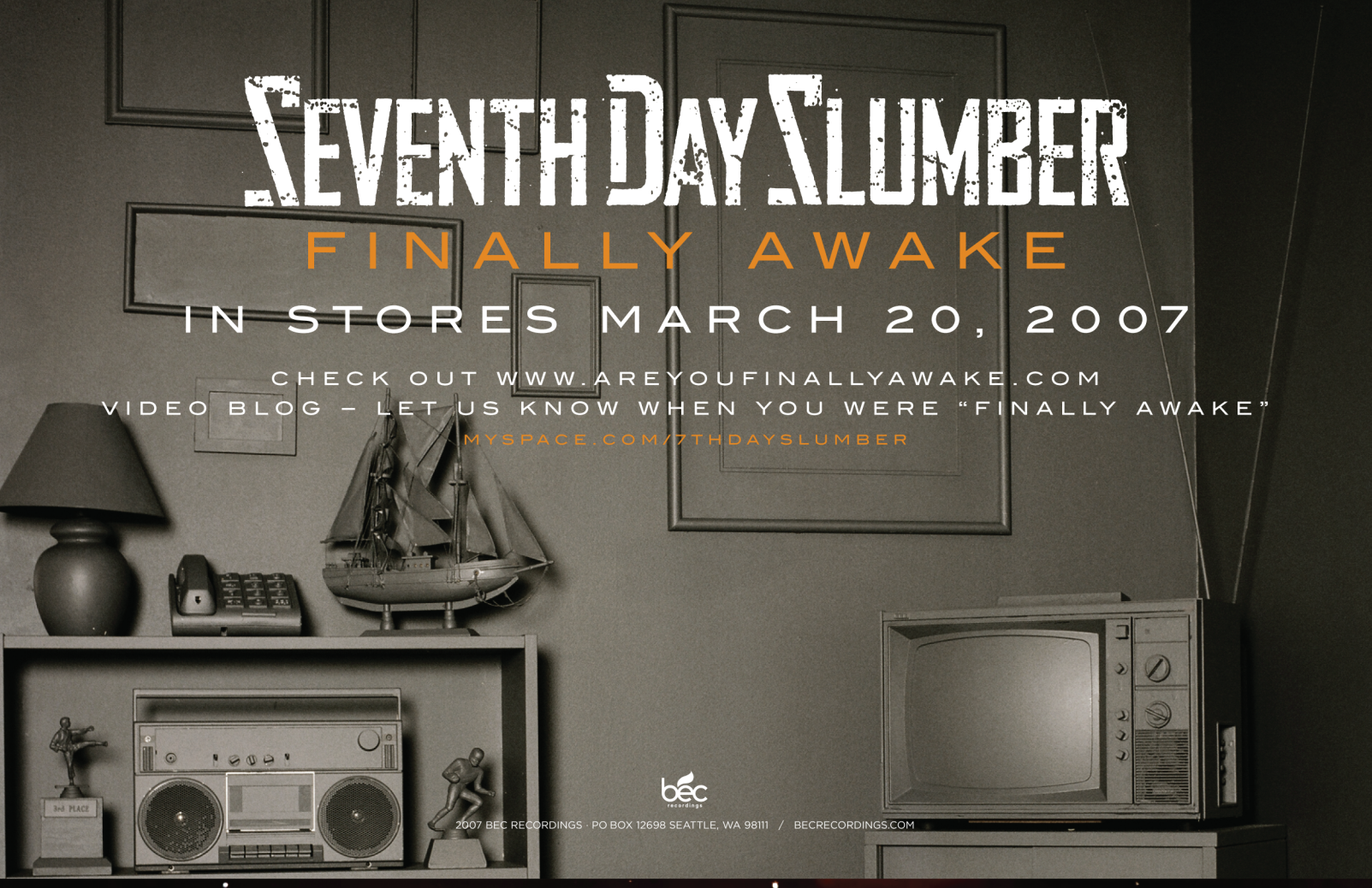
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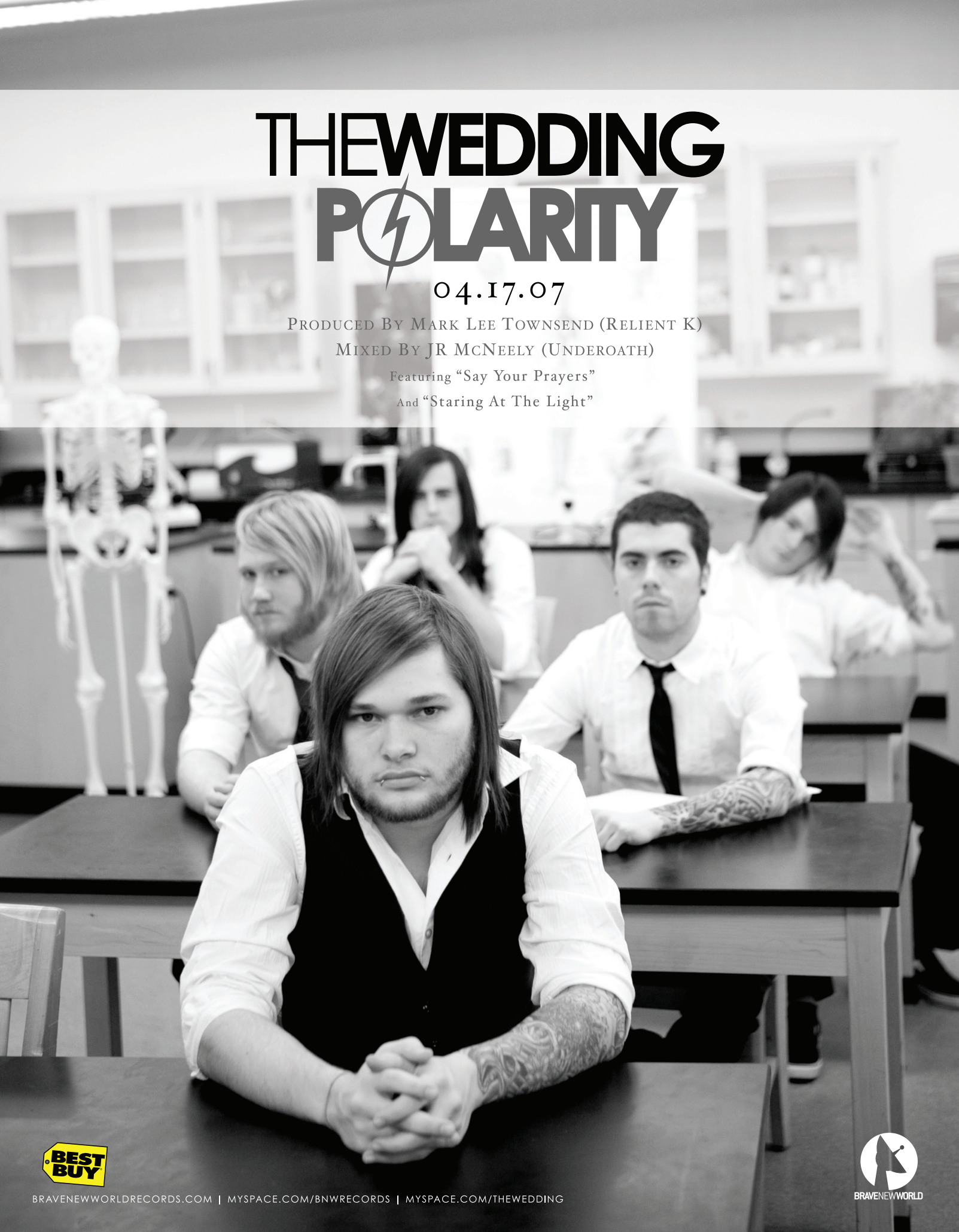
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From the editor

Doug Van Pelt

KEMPER CRABB FOR PRESIDENT!

I'm not sure what your "new issue of HM just arrived" experience is like, but I stop what I'm doing, slice open the shipping tape from the small box and grab one of the ten copies I have overnighted from the printer. I stare at the front cover, then look at the back page, then I'll sit the magazine down on a hard surface and flip through each and every page. I'll look at the visuals first, and go back and read sections later. I'm very anxious to see how the color spreads in the middle turned out, since I probably get the most GDE ("graphic design excitement") out of the big features. Being able to make a "splash" with color is pretty fun. I don't want to alter your new issue experience too much, but I'd really like to point you to page 70 to read Kemper Crabb's column. I love this guy and always appreciate the way he can both cut to the chase and be blunt, as well as make me appreciate God and His design in this universe in which we live. Do yourself a favor and make this column one of the first things you read this issue. And those other two columns? They are as spot-on as anything this issue as well. So check out that spread ... and fast!

Now, let's talk about my mistakes: I misspelled the band Desertor in the last issue's "Pick of the Litter." Sorry guys, er, uh, "¡Perdón!" In our Sep/Oct issue I forgot to mention that the Stryper biography was available at stryperbook.com... We also left out any contact url's for the band Deep Sea Diving [which can be found at myspace.com/deepseadivingband]. I also attributed the *Lost: Season 2* DVD review to the wrong movie house. It is actually available from Buena Vista. A big "I'm sorry" and a "You all, everybody" shout out to BVHE!

I'm pretty excited about the content inside this issue. I hope you enjoy it as well. If you find something particularly interesting or good or bad in this issue, send me an email and let me know. By the way, those cool Anberlin shots in this issue were taken by parkeryoung.net (the portrait) and Brandon Short (the live shots), myspace.com/thememorytree.

SPINNING AT HM NOW

MUTE MATH	*Live At The El Rey*	Captures their magic like a lightning bug in a jar.
VARIOUS ARTISTS	*The Bible Experience*	A dramatic reading full of "oomph!"
ROSIE THOMAS	*These Friends Of Mine*	Beautiful, dreamy voice as soft as air.
TOM WAITS	*Orphans: Brawlers...*	Who doesn't love this guy? Such style.
VARIOUS ARTISTS	*The Family Values Tour*	Flyleaf live is "sick." Their U2 cover isn't so hot.
VARIOUS ARTISTS	*Friends With Mic...*	A great cause and a seriously good listen.
LARRY NORMAN	*Sessions*	Larry covering some cool oldies...

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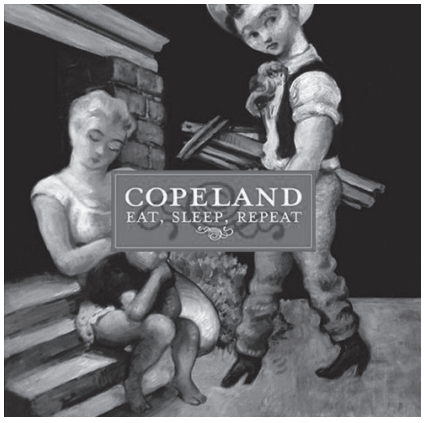

LET'S HAVE A BIBLE STUDY

I was just trying to sign up for your podcast that I saw advertised in the magazine and I can't find it. Can you point me to it? I just stumbled on your Bible Study page and really – no really – love it. I lead a high school Bible study group and so many of the discussion topics (like the Waking Ashland secular vs Christian one) would cause us to have such awesome conversations. I want to start using some or all of it – not only in the Bible study group, but even just for starting conversations with bands when I'm around them. I manage a band who is in the same boat as Waking Ashland (and who are friends with them) and we've never really dived deep enough into that topic yet. So, where is the Nov/Dec Bible study page?!?! haha. Since I'm just seeing the Sep/Oct one, I'll have plenty to work on, but I'll be eager for each new one. One more thing – I'm thinking about offering any of the high school kids at our church a subscription to your magazine. Not as a Christmas present, but just anytime year-round, if a kid wants it, I'll subscribe them for the first year. If I do that, is there any way you would give me a discount when I subscribe them? (maybe even something like for every x you give me one free?) We have about 100 show up each Wed night, but I'm guessing there might be 10 to 20 who I know who would want it right away. I also want to start giving subscriptions to band members I work with or meet on the road during the year as a Christmas present. Anyway, thanks for a great magazine!
–Eric Klein, Austin TX

Ed – Thanks for being such an encouragement and blessing! I'm so glad someone has finally noticed and used the Bible studies we offer online (we're trying to catch up and be as current as each new issue). Podcast subscription info can be found right on the main page at hmmag.com. I'd be more than happy to work out an "affiliate subscription program" with you. Thanks for the suggestion.

COPING WITH COPELAND

Well, I eagerly read the review for the new (Copeland) album, and it spoke at length about a song that was on the last record. So I thought, "Wow, they re-recorded it, I guess." Thought it odd, and the more I thought about it, I wondered. So, I checked online for the track listings of the new record, and "Love is a Fast Song" wasn't one of the ones listed. So I'm assuming that the reviewer (Andrew?) somehow got the wrong record? I had my wife read the review to see if I was just reading it wrong, and she seemed to come to the same conclusion.
–Josh L, via internet

Ed – As always, your wife is right. Neither Andrew or I had the new album with which to review/rate, so both of us (without the other knowing it) went online to listen to streaming content. Sorry for the goof! I need a straw now (cuz I suck).

TASTES LIKE SALT?

Just writing to say that your magazine is awesome and you're doing a great job – for your readers and for the Lord. Beyond the coverage of the music, I am always blessed by the touch of spirituality in the pages. It really stands out to me b/c it's done in such a tasteful (non-religious/preachy) way. For instance, there was your article about leading people to the Lord, and while you were honestly critiquing your own witness, such an article brings the focus back for your readers and makes us all examine what we're really doing. I don't remember offhand the other things I have read recently that were just spot-on and excited my spirit, but the fact that those things are in the mag are evidence of the direction you're going in, and the Spirit who's leading you. I dunno how to say it except that I really think it's wonderful and exciting. And I can imagine the pleasure you give the Lord as you put this thing together month after month. Truly. So, as you continue to bring us music coverage, thanks for glorifying Jesus as well. The effort is noted. God bless you for it.
–Lauren Schwartz, via internet

Ed – Wow! Thanks a ton for that encouragement.

DOES BODY PIERCING HURT?

I really enjoyed your input in the *Body Piercing Saved My Life* book. You shed a really good light on Christian music and I thought you had alot of great things to say about what it means to be playing Christian music. Keep up the good work, love your magazine.
–Tim Harris, via internet

HM

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SCRIPTURE "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge..." (2 Peter 1:3-5)

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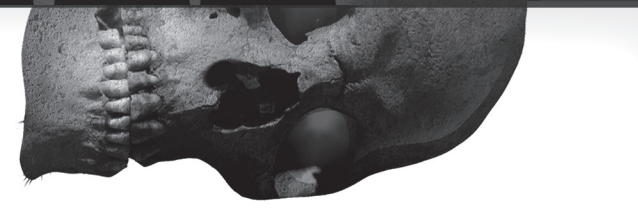

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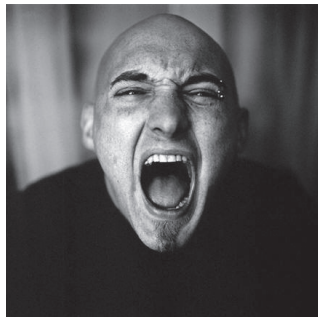
HARDNEWS
Quick & concise

TYRONE WELLS
FORMER SKYPARK VOCALIST FINDS SOUL

For the past five years (post-Skypark) Tyrone Wells has been gigging across the country, selling self-released albums from the trunk of his car. Now he's packing out The House of Blues, The El Rey Theatre, and the Troubadour in his Hollywood stomping grounds. Now signed to Universal Republic, his major label debut, *Hold On*, releases in early March. The first single from the record is "What Are We Fighting For?" Quite possibly the most diverse song on the album, it blends his organic acoustic guitar with choir vocals and organ. While his newfound major label-ness will expose him to greater audience numbers, he hasn't forgotten his performance creed: ""Whether I'm in a coffee-shop down the street or on a national tour, I'm grateful to be doing what I love."

THE GOLDEN SOUNDS
LO-FI SOUNDS FOR A HI-FI HEART

The Golden Sounds have a new album, titled, *lo-fi sounds for a hi-fi heart*. "This has been one of the most challenging years of my life and this album touches on that," relates vocalist Todd Evans. He will take these songs on the first ever internet-only tour. "As I travel, I intend to set up and play small shows at hotel rooms, bathrooms, rest stops, old country roads, pretty much anywhere I end up alone. Then I will video and document it and put it up online. That will be the only way you can see the tour, since no one will know where I will be performing ... and if they do find out; well, I'll just keep my hotel room locked and they can sit in the hall. It's just me and the internet audience ... so I guess you could say I'm not going for the highest grossing tour of 2007."



Seven System disbands

A little over a year after moving from SoCal to Nashville, the band is throwing in the towel. "There are many reasons for this decision, and there are even more lessons to be learned from all of this. One thing we want to let you all know is that in no way are we breaking up because of division or arguments. We all remain friends and love one another like family. The disbanding of Seven System is something God has put on the heart of every member involved. One of the main reasons for this decision is that we feel in chasing 'the dream,' we had gotten away from the original ministry God had laid upon our hearts some six years ago. God has asked us to make a choice, and the choice was clear. The awesome thing is that even in spite of our shortcomings, God still used the message in our music. It is our hope that our lesson could also be a lesson to anyone who reads this." Seven System will be doing a final farewell show in Southern California this May.

News bullets

Right at press time **Robert Randolph & The Family Band** were slated to play at The Leary Firefighters Foundation Benefit Concert and opening the 55th annual NHL All-Star Game in Dallas. The band also has a song on the *Stomp The Yard* movie soundtrack: "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That."

Bloodlined Calligraphy went out on the road in January with First Blood, Death Before Dishonor, and Dead Hearts. For those that missed the news, Bloodlined Calligraphy has a new line-up (and new vocalist): **Ellen Hoffman** is the new frontwoman for this hard-hitting band; and **Robbie Coran** is the new drummer.

On December 19, **Jason Garcia** stopped fighting cancer and went home to be with the Lord. His band, **Speakers For The Dead**, vow to dedicate 2007 to his memory. [myspace.com/speakersforthedead]

Emery is hitting the road on the *2007 Sub City Take Action! Tour*, along with The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus, Scary Kids Scaring Kids, A Static Lullaby and Kaddisfly.

War Of Ages is hitting the road with Terror on the *All For Revenge Tour,* along with The Warriors, All Shall Perish, and Stick To Your Guns.

After 5 years at Asterik Studio, **Demon Hunter**'s graphic designers, **Don** & **Ryan Clark** have parted ways with the rest of the team to start a brand new firm, Invisible Creature. "It's been a lifetime in the making, and is the next chapter in our relentless hunger for creativity." New Zealand's Broadcasting Standards Authority gave the Special Edition *Triptych* DVD a PG rating.

All Star United signed with 7 Spin Music. The band's new album, *Love & Radiation*, will be available March 20.

Skillet is touring with **Flyleaf** early this Spring.

The Myriad has been recording their next project, *With Arrows, With Poise*, with producer Tim Patalan (Sponge). They took a break to tour a little with **Lovedrug** and **Brandtson**.

Means

BY BEAR FRAZER

Dylan Johnstone isn't a professional bodybuilder, but he has a powerful voice. On this cold afternoon, the scruffy 22 year-old screamer of Means (a Christian rock outfit based in Regina, Saskatchewan) is laying down vocals for *Sending You Strength*, their sophomore effort loaded with intense rhythms and inspiring lyrics. "The album is about finding the strength to live our lives because life isn't always easy to live," he explains. "I guess a lot of the music we write is about finding the strength to move on and get through whatever you have to go through."

In the past two years, Means has become a stronger group. When Marc LaPoint left the band shortly after the release of their debut *In Red Grace* in 2004, courtesy of Torque Recordings, Johnstone was recruited to fill the empty void immediately after watching them perform. "They're really nice guys, lighthearted and their music was really cool. They were a band in a small town and they were doing their own thing, not really trying to impress anybody," Johnstone says of his band mates. "So when they asked me to join, I was like, 'Yeah, for sure.'"

As soon as he joined Means, they began recording new music for their 2005 EP entitled *More Than Watchmen for the Morning* and it redefined the group's style. On tracks like "You Will Become" and "Never Walk Alone," the band displays their aggressive melodies paired off with captivating messages meant to elevate the listener's mindset. "The lyrics of ours are meant to be encouraging and it helps me myself when I'm down," Johnstone says. "When I sing these songs that are uplifting, it gives me a good attitude."

Although Means has a deal with Torque Recordings, they haven't been able to distribute their music in the United States. Fortunately for the Christian rockers, they were able to secure a deal with Facedown Records in late 2006 to fix that problem. In March, Means will send strength everywhere with their sophomore record and inch their way closer to achieving their universal goals. "We just wanna be able to play music full-time and help each other out as friends," Johnstone says. "We want our music to be encouraging to the people who listen to it, and we want to be able to learn from people and help people deal with the things they have to deal with in their lives."

Pillar heads out on the second leg of its *Days of the Reckoning Tour*, presented by the indie film, *Invisible Children*. It'll be a 4-band bill, including **Showbread**, **Tyler Reed**, and a local band at each show. **Rob Beckley** explains the lineup: "We have wanted to play with Showbread for quite a while; their live show is simply amazing. Additionally, we wanted to get Tyler Reed on the way up. I think they are going to be huge and are definitely a band to watch in 2007. After a decade of touring and playing shows, we know how hard it is to get your start, especially as a rock band. So, with this tour, we want to give exposure to some local bands we have met or heard about during our travels."

Last spring **The Afters**' song, "Beautiful Love," was the theme song for MTV's reality series *8th & Ocean*, which spawned the single selling more than 90,000 digital tracks in a six-week period and over 189,000 in 2006. The band is now working with producers Brown Bannister and Dan Muckala on their next album. "The songs are some of the best we've ever written," states vocalist **Josh Havens**.

Jars of Clay are hitting the road for a big tour with **NEEDTOBREATHE** and **Burlap to Cashmere**.

Scotoma Promotions and its independent bands have partnered together to form Scotoma Artist Co-op to help promote the bands' self-released albums with joint ads, distro and other media avenues. It will be run as an actual label. **The Canvas Waiting** is the group's first release, *In Search Of Beginnings*. EP's from **MAHTEO** and **A Scenic Remembrance** will soon follow.

Anberlin will kick off a headlining U.S. tour February 21 in Charlotte, NC. The coast-to-coast trek will hit New York's Bowery Ballroom and the El Rey Theatre in Los Angeles. Bayside, Meg & Dia and **Jonezetta** will provide support for the winter trek.

The Smoking Popes will begin recording their first studio album since 1997.

HARDNEWS
Page fourteen

Ricky Lee Jones

BY DAN MACINTOSH

Stars that find God are a dime a dozen. Such divine discoveries always seem to happen in prison or during rehab. But Rickie Lee Jones defies such predictable celebrity salvation. Her experience is by no means a last minute plea to the governor upstairs, so to speak. Jones' latest CD, *Sermon on Exposition Boulevard*, is inspired by Jesus' words, and she did not 'get religion' so much as she discovered anew the Red Letter Edition's poetic beauty.

"I came to read *The Words of Jesus*, my friend Lee Cantelon's book," she explains. "I think I felt an affectionate affinity for what Lee was trying to do and I just put myself – from my point of view about what I see going on in Christianity, with empathy towards Lee and reading the words of Christ – and just let myself go."

Jones does not have a particularly stringent religious background, which may be why there is such tangible freshness in her artistic approach to spiritual things. "I was raised Catholic, gently," she says. "I used to say, 'I'm a recovering Catholic.' It (Catholicism) didn't leave me very damaged. My brother and sister, they grew up and went to Catholic schools, a Catholic convent and Catholic military school. They were damaged in the ways that people are damaged who go to those kinds of things. But it (Catholicism) was very romantic and beautiful to me. I loved it a lot when I was little. I wanted to be a nun like any good Catholic wants to be. And then I just left it behind when I got older. I visit churches now and then, but I'm always disappointed. I'm disappointed in the Mass. I'm disappointed in the lack of luster and interest and the monotone that everybody speaks in when they do the Mass. It's kind of bewildering to me. But I still like to go sit once in a while and watch it."

Jones does not call herself a Christian. Her theology, as well as her musical approach, leans closer to Van Morrison's mystical musical musings, instead. "I tend to like to call God 'The Invisible World,'" she explains. "I refer to God as a place, more or less, than as a person. Even that concept is maligned. When you say, you know, 'I speak to 'The Invisible World' all the time,' that's kind of a mystical thing. And God is mystical."

Sermon on Exposition Boulevard, if you can set your quibbles with Jones' theology aside for a moment, is one beautiful sojourn into the mystic. It is Christ music at its best.

News bullets

The Innocence Mission drop its ninth studio album on Badman Recording Co. on March 20th. Titled, *We Walked in Song*, the album is already being hailed as one of their strongest works, though for songwriter Karen Peris there was great personal loss in the beginning stages of creating the album. Badman's Dylan Magierek explains, "Sometime after the passing of her father, Karen began to write as a way of coping with this great loss, which was compounded with the loss of her mother. The result is some of the most beautiful and heartfelt material I have heard from the band." The band plans on touring the East Coast in the spring of 2007.

Maylene and the Sons of Disaster are releasing a digital-only EP entitled *The Day Hell Broke Loose at Sicard Hollow* prior to their sophomore full-length on Ferret Music, which will follow in the footsteps of Zeppelin and Chicago by simply being called *II*. The EP will contain two new songs: "Dry The River" and "Don't Ever Cross A Trowel" and the previously unreleased "Is That a Threat or a Promise." *II* promises to expound on the true tales of 1920's gangster Ma Barker and her prohibition era real-life crime family, pushing the ingredients from their critically acclaimed, self-titled debut toward a more complex assault. The album is slated for a March 20, 2007 release and will feature 11 tracks augmented by a striking 16 page, full-color booklet featuring powerful photography from Ryan Russell (Mastodon, Big Business, Slayer). Mono Vs. Stereo will distribute *II* into the CBA market. At press time the band was hitting Europe alongside **Norma Jean**.

Velvet Blue Music has some exciting new releases available now: **Joy Electric**'s 6-song EP, *Workmanship*; two new 7" singles from **The Broadway Hush** – "Moon Songs" and "Sun Songs;" the new *EP3* from **Kissing Cousins**; and the *Revenant Waltz* EP from **Gary Murray**.

The documentary *American Hardcore* is now being released on DVD on February 22.

As Cities Burn

BY CRESCENT SPRING RAINWATER

"We were about to go on tour with Underoath and on *Warped Tour*, and I thought, 'This is everything.'" This is how Colin, rhythm guitarist for As Cities Burn, remembers the band's situation right before they announced their break up in March. Then on July 14th they announced that due to the overwhelming response of their fans, As Cities Burn would be staying together and recording a new album. I interviewed Colin about how As Cities Burn went from counting down the days to the end of the band, to writing material for their new album.

What led to the decision to end the band?
We'd been on an insanely intense touring schedule: ten months a year for three straight years. Our singer, TJ, proposed to his girlfriend but never got to be with her. He was burnt out, so he told us: "I've been thinking a long time, and you need to know that at the end of this year I'm going to be gone." We decided we couldn't go on without TJ because he's the front-man.

How did your fans change your mind and make you want to stay together?
A show would end, and there would be a line of kids crying because they thought this was their last chance to see us. A kid would talk about how something had connected with him, and we'd share an intense moment. One night this guy walked up and said, "My life was going down the drain and I was contemplating suicide – but then I listened to your record and found hope in it, and I decided to keep on living." We prayed with the guy and hugged him.

How much of a role did T.J. play in your decision to stay together?
Actually, T.J. isn't going to be in the band. We decided to get back together and T.J. said he'd do another record but wasn't sure about touring and leaving his wife. And then, at the beginning of our headlining tour we parted ways with Pascal, our bassist. So, when we came home, Cody, me, Aaron, and our new guitarist Chris, were practicing together, but T.J. couldn't come because he lives two hours away and has a real job. So Cody was doing all the singing. Finally TJ said, "I don't want to bail on you, but since Cody's been working out so well I'm not going to be able to do it." So Cody's the singer now, I'm playing guitar, Chris is playing guitar, Aaron is playing drums; and we have a friend on bass. TJ will be doing a bunch of vocals. We're going to get him in for a weekend to scream on a bunch of songs. He'll be more than a guest vocal, but not exactly a member of the band. TJ loves the band and wanted to be a part of another record, but his wife was the most important thing in the world to him.

Where are you at with working on the new album?
We begin recording the record February 12, so right now we're writing, and the record is well-over half done. The release date should be August or September.

What direction are you moving musically?
It's not nearly as heavy, but it's still raw and dirty, with crazy guitar work. It's a little more accessible, easier to listen to. It's the best stuff we've written.

News bullets

The line-up for the 7th annual *Facedown Fest* has been announced. "This year being the label's 10th anniversary, we have asked some alumni Family members to grace our stage. **Sinai Beach** will perform on the first night of the Fest and **Point of Recognition (w**ho are re-uniting exclusively for Facedown Fest) will play the second night. Besides the two afore-mentioned, the line-up will include: **xDeathstarx**; **Nodes of Ranvier**; **Seventh Star**; **Alove For Enemies**; **Kingston Falls**; **War of Ages**; **No Innocent Victim**; **Inked In Blood**; **XLooking Forwardx**; **Means**; **Call To Preserve**; and a couple more bands to be announced later. Both nights will be at the Glasshouse in Pomono, CA and advance tickets will only cost $12 per day or $20 for both.

Widows & Orphans are releasing their first full-length under their new moniker (fka The Kirby). Titled, *Everything Is Gold*, it will contain new and old material from the group's five year existence. The album packaging will include artwork from guitarist **Colin Hobbs** (HM insiders will recognize his name as a former intern from 2003). The disc will also include the band's video, "We Are All Exiles." The band just signed with Blood & Ink and will work on another new album in the Fall.

Ponoka debuts on Volkoren with *Hindsight,* featuring singer-songwriter elements and "unpolished rock, lo-fi and poppy electronica."

At The Close Of Every Day have a new album coming out in March, called *Leaves You Puzzled*.

I Am Ghost are hitting the road in February and March for the *2007 Epitaph Tour*, with The Matches, Escape The Fate, and The Higher Road-Ready.

Switchfoot will quickly hit the road to support *Oh! Gravity* in February with **Copeland**.

The band **Donna Mea** recently made an appearance on NBC's *Friday Night Lights*, where they performed as a band called Crucivictorious.

HARDNEWS
Page sixteen

Enough Already!

BY JAMIE LEE RAKE

The mellower the music, the more apt marrieds are to make it together? Reasonable theorizing, considering the dearth of wed twosomes in metal, but the mutedly semi-arch lounge folk-psychedelia of **BEN + VESPER** comes from a couple sharing a last name. Their debut *Questions* EP (Sounds Familyre) recalls lovelier qualities of Stereolab, Belle & Sebastian and Cocteau Twins with oddly godly matrimonial angst that refrains from Fleetwood Mac and Abba patos. Am fiending for their full-length, natch'.

English reggae toaster **WATCHMAN** would do well to know his strengths as well as the couple above. While chatting in dancehall stylee over eclectic uptempo tracks on *Like Neva B4*, he excels, especially with stories to tell or parties to start. Slow him down to fit a slow r&b jam, however, and...some of you must have liked it when Buju Banton and Mad Cobra did likewise, hey? Bonus track with Watch's pastor and church choir compensates appreciably. [OTRRecords.com].

If you vibe on Jump5's wholesome effervescence and approve of JoJo on *Soul Train*, **CALI** is your gal. She infuses r&b, rock and soul gospel influences into 'tween pop with the Lord and right living in mind, even if the former is mentioned by name. Coming closer than many her young age to getting her sonic game as compelling as Gwen Stefani or Justin Timberlake, it should be worth keeping an ear on how she matures spiritually and musically. [WaypointEntertainment.com]

Soulful in another way is **MARTY RAYBON**. It's been a while since he graced the Christian market proper, but his faith remains evident on his latest, *When The Sand Runs Out*. Between his recent bluegrass forays and commercial country past with Shenandoah, Raybon and his Full Circle band split the difference with supple, minimal-leaning Americana. It suits the way Raybon can wring the emotion out of a lyric or do the "regular Southern guy" a bit better than Craig Morgan. And a Byrds cover! [HMGNashville.com]

Rap the other columnist didn't cover!...
If **BIZZART**'s appearance in the chaotically cool *40 Bands/80 Minutes* documentary of Los Angeles' extreme indieground piqued your interest for more, check him on his latest longplayer, *Bloodshot Mama*. In the same way Mark Heard paralleled the prophet Jeremiah with forlorn folk-rock, Biz' wonders where the Lord is in a cruel world with elegantly noisy hip-hop. [DVD doc' and CD, SoundsAreActive.com].

QWEL claims Christ, likes Al Franken and could match David Bazan in a cussing contest. He and **DJ MEATY OGRE** nonetheless offer a slew of socio-psycho-scriptural grist with buzzy, dusty production on *Freezer Burner* that's bound to get heads bobbing and souls searching. [Galapagos4.com]

Next time: a machine that could save your vinyl records much wear? Here's hoping... and the usual whiplashingly schizoid sonic assortment.

Contribute by sending tuneage to P.O. Box 29; Waupun, WI 53963-0029 U.S.A.

News bullets

Marcos Curiel has re-joined **P.O.D.** and **Jason Truby** has departed. The band has also signed a new album deal. Manager Tim Cook posted a message on payableondeath.com that chronicled how Marcos called him out of the blue on November 1st, during which Truby called in. When Cook called Truby back, he was told that he felt led to step out. Coincidence or providence? Cook went on to describe the first new meeting of the original members: "Marcos showed up with this heavy backpack. We all kept asking what was in there. During lunch he pulls out copies of the new U2 book, *U2 BY U2*, and he gives one to each of us. He said, 'Man, I just want to inspire people again.'" He went on to tell his friends that he's been up 'til 3 or 4 AM every night playing music and unable to put his guitar down.

It's cool to look back at Sonny's interview in last year's Jan/Feb issue (#117), where he said, "Just yesterday at the studio, Wuv popped in the *Live At Tomfest* disc and it was just so raw and so dirty, ya know? ... Jason said, 'Man, Marcos, he should still be here, ya know?' I think it was an emotional time for us. You know (with), Jason… I wouldn't change it for the world. I just hope that, you know, in the future with Marcos things will get better."

By the way, if you're looking for the best bargain on P.O.D.'s *Greatest Hits* album, look no further than Best Buy, who are offering the out-of-print *Warriors EP, Volume One* as a free bonus.

The Arena Rock Recording Company, in association with Solid Rock Records, is releasing *Larry Norman: The Anthology*, a 20-track compilation that will guide listeners chronologically though **Norman**'s career, beginning with his early days in the 60's band People! ("I Love You") through his critically-acclaimed and, at times, controversial solo albums of the 70's and 80's ("Reader's Digest," "Why Should The Devil Have All The Good Music?," "Watch What You're Doing" and more). It'll be digitally remastered and feature extensive liner notes as well as rare and never-before-seen photographs and artwork.

Oh, Sleeper

BY NATHAN DOYLE

Oh, Sleeper is the X-Men of modern music. Each of its five members – Micah Kinard, Shane Blay, Ryan Conley, Lucas Starr, and James Erwin – come from a background of failure and hardship only to join together to create something extraordinary. "There seems to be this underlying theme when talking about how this project came together . . . everyone in this band was torn on whether or not they even wanted to continue playing music," says bassist, Lucas Starr. "Oh, Sleeper has been our chance to go back and fix the things we weren't happy with in our previous musical attempts."

With Starr, Erwin, and Conley coming from a stint with former indie band Terminal (Tooth & Nail Records) and Blay's previous experience in Between the Buried and Me, the boys in Oh, Sleeper have a musical resume like none other. "The two bands are like night and day," Starr states, "I definitely enjoy myself onstage more than I did in Terminal . . . There's just something about this style of music that makes kids go crazy. And I love it."

The Armored March, Oh, Sleeper's five track EP, is a crushing metal onslaught of good versus evil that strikes with more brutality than a Wolverine-Sabertooth fight sequence. Intense guitars, passionate vocals, and an astounding rhythm section help support the scene of medieval war described in Kinard's lyrics, and since playing their first show in July of 2006, the band has created an astounding following, "I think our previous musical endeavors were extremely beneficial in helping to create a buzz for the new project. . . With all the new bands forming these days you've got to have some sort of credibility or no one will even give you a chance. Although, I don't think we'd be this far along if it wasn't for MySpace. That silly website has been an exceptionally useful tool in helping get this band off the ground." Starr continues, "I feel like there is a reason everything has come together so quickly. God has been doing some awesome things and we realize that we have a purpose. Oh, Sleeper is more than just a band who writes songs for kids to enjoy. At the end of the day, a song is nothing more than a bunch of chords and notes strategically thrown together. Don't get me wrong, music is awesome, but I totally feel that there is more to this life than writing a hit song and selling records. Anyone can learn how to play an instrument, but what good is it if you only use that talent for self gratification? I'd like to think that the music we are writing is challenging us not only as musicians, but also as people."

SeverYourTies has been creating a buzz with some intense shows in SoCal.

The debut album from **Deas Vail**, *All The Houses Look The Same*, comes out on March 6. The record was produced by Mark Lee Townsend (Relient K) and mixed by J.R. McNeely (Underoath, Relient K, Acceptance). The band will be touring non-stop starting in the spring.

Check out the band **Evans Blue** (Hollywood Records). Vocalist/lyricist **Kevin Matisyn** grew up on a steady diet of Christian hard music.

The Burning Season have signed to Eulogy Recordings, which will release the band's second album, *Onward Anthem*.

King Never (aka guitarist **Matt McCabe**) has released a new album, *Lullabies and Sleepless Nights (Ambient Guitar Noise: Volume 2)*. He previously worked with prog-rock band **Farewell To Juliet** on their album *Grace and Dire Circumstances*, providing haunting loops and a blistering guitar solo on "Bittersweet."

The Fold will release its new album, *Secrets Keep You Sick,* on May 22.

Dark Romantics have a release, *Some Midnight Kissin'*, on Lujo Records. The album was engineered and produced by **Jason Martin** of **Starflyer 59**, who initially took interest in the band via some recordings and convinced them to fly to California to record for free.

Matisyahu's new album, *No Place To Be*, features a bonus *Live In Israel* DVD with the live show shot in Tel Aviv in Dec '05.

Becoming The Archetype is recording its sophomore album, *The Physics of Fire*. At presstime they are over in Europe with **The Chariot**.

UK band **Death Is Not Welcome Here** is planning on coming back to the USA in June for some more touring.

Before Their Eyes has signed to Rise Records. They hit the studio in February with Joey Sturgis for a June release.

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LIVE REPORT

Trans-Siberian Orchestra

December 22

BY DOUG VAN PELT

AUSTIN, TX – The travelling troupe known as Trans-Siberian Orchestra have got one of the sweetest gigs around. Once a year they hit the road and – taking a tip from the "Greatest Show on Earth" – they split into two teams to cover twice as much ground. While a sweet gig, no one ever said it was easy, as night after night they play shows (sometimes two in one day) and actually kindle a little bit of "Christmas magic" each night. They utilize every heavy metal trick in the book, yet somehow not a single moment feels contrived or cheesy. No small feat – even for skilled metal musicians.

The past three years or so has been almost the same show, which leans heavily on the *Christmas Eve & Other Stories* and *The Lost Christmas Eve* albums. The fact that they take an age-old story and a performance not too unlike the previous year and breath new life into it is pretty amazing.What this group somehow does is take the audience back in time, past the cynicism of the teenage years, past the letdowns of sad holiday times, and takes an old concept like the Christmas musical and makes it joyous. Even in a post-Nirvana era where soloing doesn't quite impress the way it used to, all the visual and aural senses get overloaded with electronic bliss, pyro, world class showmanship, and snow.

The narrator introduces the story, and "An Angel Came Down" chimes in, giving it musical wings. "O' Come All Ye Faithful" and "O' Holy Night" get the twin guitar treatment as the Frank Erwin Center arena fills with the sound of melodic metal. "A Mad Russian's Christmas" changes the tone, creating an ominous setting for the next segment, which soon juxtaposes the hope of the coming "Prince of Peace" with the sadness and tragedy of the war-torn world we live in. It gives way to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," where it's quite obvious that the arena is filling with Jesus-centered praise. The refrain of "O Little Town Of Bethlehem" is played by a string section (supported by locals from the Austin Symphony). The narrator describes an angel's flight over Sarajevo. The segment ends with a detail that went unnoticed last year – red running light effects that appeared as strafing missiles in a night sky. One of the few new faces from the past two years appears to sing the blues bar piano tune, "Good King Joy," where he coaxes the audience to sing along to another great hymn / carol, "Joy To The World." The Les Paul versus flanged Strat battle that ensues at the end was especially fun in a city like Austin, which knows those scales and notes quite well. One of the touching highlights each year is the bluesy centerpiece, "Old City Bar," where Bart Shatto acts in character as a bum telling a heart-warming Christmas Eve story about a bartender that gives all the tavern's cash to a girl to fly her home for the holiday. He never fails to get laughter during the performance – like when he touches the microphone as if it might shock him or offers a drink to the guitar strumming music director Al Pitrelli – all the while tugging at our hearts. His old raspy vocal delivery would make Rod Stewart or James Taylor envious. Other stellar performances include the Jackson Flying-V shredder Angus Clark, who battles electronic violinist Anna Phoebe quite tastefully in a run through the arena and atop a hydraulic platform in the back.

The band cuts loose with a cover of "Layla," as well as some of the jams from *Beethoven's Last Night* album. Pitrelli was extremely classy and funny throughout, leaving the crowd on a very happy note and inviting the crowd to an open after-show party to meet the band.

Guitars and pyro photo by Mark Weiss;
the amazing laser photo by Lewis Lee;
and the lit-up crowd photo by Mark Weiss

Heaven's Metal

Metal tracks

1

2

3

• **Bloodgood** has added a second guitarist to its reunited line-up: **Oz Fox**[1] (who, of course, will still remain a part of **Stryper**). The band is looking to remaster its last album, *All Stand Together*, along more modern rock sounds. The band hopes to do some Northwest dates with Stryper and make a splash at GMA.

• **Once Dead** is calling its new album *Visions of Hell*. This will be released via a collaboration between Roxx Productions and Retroactive Records. They also hope to release the debut of San Diego metal band **Stricken**, as well as a new **Deliverance** album.

• **Eluveitie**[2] has left Fear Dark for Twilight, a bigger underground label in Europe. **Kekal** has also left Fear Dark. **Morphia** is writing songs for the follow-up to their succesful album, *Fading Beauty*.

• **Slechtvalk** hopes to record a new album later this year. The band recently joined Swedish pagan-metal band Manegarm on a short tour through Holland and Belgium.

• **Ultimatum**[3] has been hard at work finishing up their fourth full length album, called *Into the Pit*, produced by Ysidro Garcia.

• **Common Yet Forbidden** just signed to Bombworks Records. Hailing from Orlando, FL, they "deftly mix new thrash and death metal to create a furious, technical, wall of sound."

• Sweden's Endtime Festival will be on March 30 & 31 with: **Antestor**, **Crimson Moonlight**, **Drottnar**, **Evergrace**, **Extol**, **Inevitable End**, **Harmony**, **Vardoger**, **Veni Domine**, **Virgin Forest**.

• Retroactive has launched a new sub-label. Watergrave Records releases to come include: **Reverend Seven**; **Redeemer**; **Ultimatum**; **Nancy Jo Mann**; and **His Witness**.

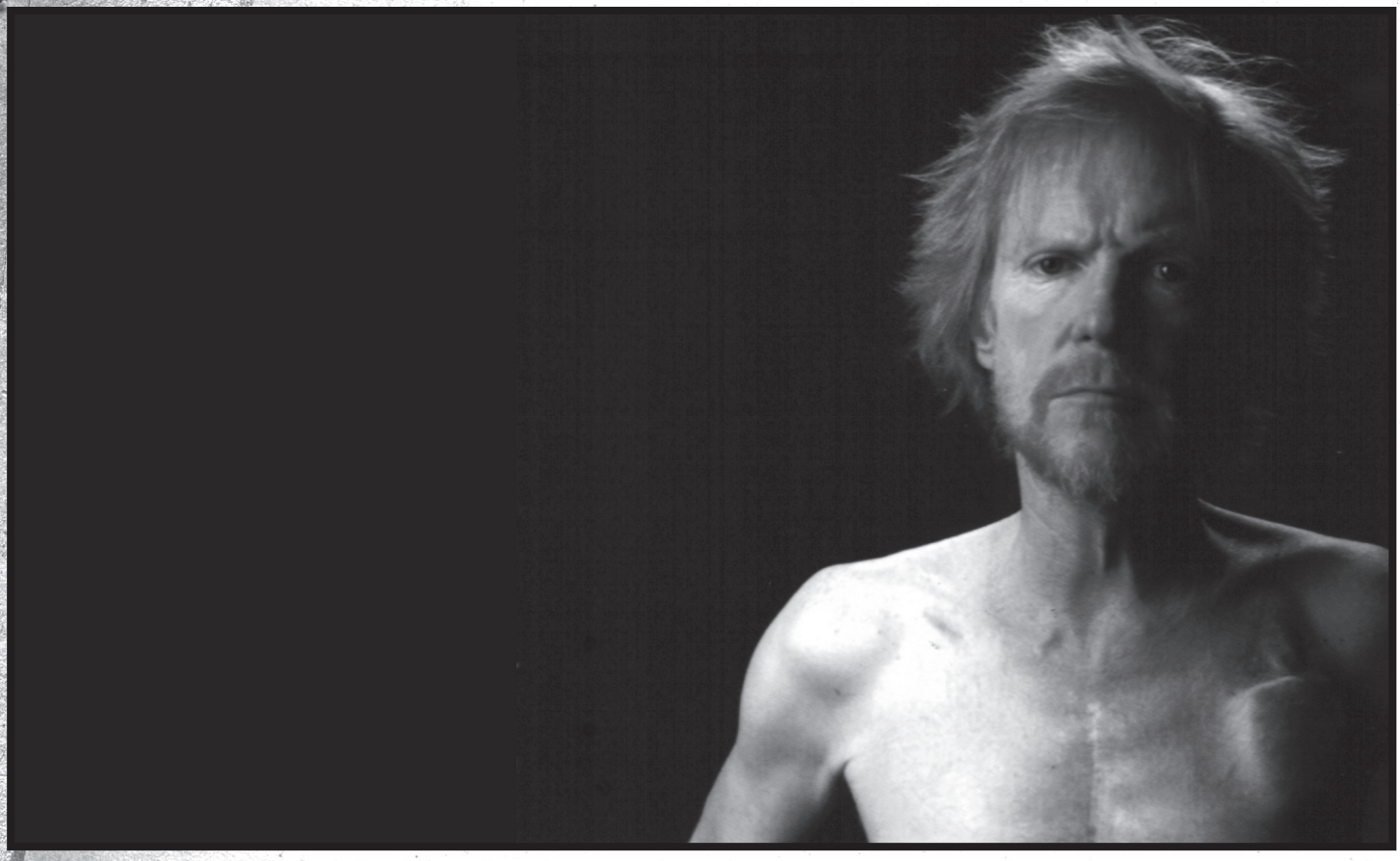
Album reviews

STRYPER – *Greatest Hits: Live in Puerto Rico* (DVD)
It's amazing to witness Stryper's popularity in other countries. This DVD was recorded mere months after the 2003 fall reunion tour, where Stryper played clubs holding 3,000 maximum here in the U.S. But at this sold-out show in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the crowd is as big as the band played to in arenas during their heyday circa 1987-1988. The average music buyer in foreign countries is not concerned with current trends, and that's a great thing for a band like Stryper. The audio and video here is absolutely professional quality. The band has never sounded better, Michael Sweet hitting all the right notes, Oz Fox soloing on cue, Robert Sweet pounding his massive drum kit while having a great time, and original bassist Tim Gaines reveling in the moment. This was Gaines' final show, as he's since departed to pursue other musical interests. Only two complaints. There are no extras, and it seems that the live video footage is spliced together with footage that didn't actually take place in one seamless show in San Juan. There are times when suddenly a band member is wearing two different outfits within one song. And no, they didn't have wardrobe changes ala the 80's! This is a limited edition run, which leaves open the possibility for this being sold in stores in the future. If that happens, let's hope the band packs it full of extra goodies. *[Fifty Three Five]* *Chad Olson*

MICHAEL SWEET – *Him*
If you loved the sound of Stryper's power ballads, then you'll be in for a treat when you listen to this collection of 10 classic and re-worked hymns - a project he's been working on for half a decade. Unlike other praise and worship albums, the arrangements are mostly a far cry from the original melodies. Like a lot of modern worship, some songs are easier to just listen along to as Michael hits some fairly high notes, and others are suitable for singing along. *[Dog & Pony]* *Doug Van Pelt*

Classic Moments in Christian Rock history

BY DOUG VAN PELT



[1972-1977]. Larry Norman is a lyrical and musical genius. Besides signing several other brilliant artists to his Solid Rock indie label (Daniel Amos, Mark Heard, Randy Stonehill, to name a few), he would weave hidden gems into his songs. For example, his most noteworthy trifecta of albums – *Only Visiting This Planet*, *So Long Ago The Garden*, and *In Another Land,* each ended with the corresponding title being the very last words sung on the album. (For example: "Don't ask me / I'm only visiting this planet" and "...we left it oh, so long ago, the garden"). His tripped-out and aptly titled "Nightmare #9," talks about a marionette that came to life "and spoke exactly 89 words to me ... count 'em." Then, two albums later he returns to the motif by singing "89 is really 99" in "Let That Tape Keep Rolling." It's true that the day of beautiful and visual gatefold record (vinyl) album covers are long gone, but so too seem to be lyrical puzzles like Norman was known for.

LIFE IN YOUR WAY

BY MARK FISHER

Taken from a footnote referring to a passage in Psalms, the name Life in Your Way has provided countless hours of after show fun for the Connecticut-based band. "9 out of 10 times we get [asked about our name] ... it's some dude saying, 'dude, life DOES get in your way,' which leads to us cracking slack-jawed jokes for hours in the van following the blessed occasion," guitarist/vocalist James Allen states happily. A nice state of being considering Life in Your Way's road to Solid State Records and their new album, *Waking Giants*.

The Connecticut hardcore scene boasts many great bands but Life in Your Way's poetic outlook and often "soft" elements are far from a natural fit among bands like Hatebreed, With Honor, and Blood Has Been Shed. "We all grew up in this scene and we love it. [We] kinda stick out like a sore thumb in some ways musically because we aren't tough at all. It's awesome though because the kids in the scene make it work and have embraced us and we get along great," says Allen.

Completely overhauling the band not once, but twice, they considered changing their name in lieu of trying to appease their die hard fans before 2005's *Ignite & Rebuild*. "I feel that [*Ignite & Rebuild*] lacks a certain level of integrity," Allen states, "I think that the record was key in making us the band we are now but we were trying to keep the old kids happy while making the music we loved." For their Solid State Records debut the band chose to ignore everyone and follow their hearts, locking themselves in a basement to write a record that would once and for all satisfy themselves as artists. "On the new album Dave and I took a totally different approach and let ourselves experiment with some abstract concepts, things you might hear on a Radiohead or Muse album," Allen states, "We really tried to sing really beautiful melodies as well. Ones that fit our voices rather than just writing the highest whiniest parts we could."

Since every band seems to have something to say about the Tooth & Nail family of labels, it seemed only natural to see how Life in Your Way feel they fit in, as well as how they felt about possible "warnings" from their predecessors. "Tooth & Nail, and Chad [Johnson] specifically have been great to us," unleashes Allen as if hungry to clear the air. "These guys make dreams come true for so many of the bands on the label, and most of the current bands will tell you the same thing. Most bands are wising up these days and are hiring proper lawyers for their deals. Back in the day bands would sign crappy deals and then they were expected to live up to them, so they talked smack." After 11 months of negotiations the dust cleared, the work began, and the band is satisfied that they have the deal and the record they wanted, shouldering the success or failure of *Waking Giants* themselves.

Only time will tell if Life In Your Way had any impact on the world at large, but to the band the bottom line is simple – dudebros. "We do this because we love the kids in the scene and we want to hang out with as many as possible," says Allen, "We want to share the same joys that we have with those kids if they are willing to listen, and if not, we still want to hang with them. We don't have to believe the same thing to be dudebros."

lifeinyourway.com

Do you know what a dudebro is?

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
where there is injury, pardon
where there is doubt, faith
where there is despair, hope
where there is darkness, light
where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much
seek to be consoled as to console
to be understood as to understand
to be loved as to love

For it is in giving that we receive
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned
and it is in dying
that we are born
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LOST OCEAN

BY TIM HALLILA

Fans of bands like Mae and Copeland may find a new love in 2007 with Credential Records' new signing, Lost Ocean. Hailing from Bakersfield, California, the band is looking forward to introducing their fresh sounding, piano-driven aesthetics to fans around the country with their first nationwide tour, a debut album, and a music video for their first single, "Just Glide."

Tell me about what it was like starting out as a band in Bakersfield. Was it easy to find shows locally? Were there many similar bands in the area? Did the town put any limitations on you or was it supportive?
It definitely wasn't the easiest place to start a band. As far as music goes, Bakersfield is pretty much country and metal and that's about it, although there's sort of a screamo scene. But for a band like us, there really weren't too many bands locally to play with that were more in the piano-based rock genre. I actually started out in a metal band, so back then it was easier to get shows in town, but once I met Skyler (keyboardist) and we started Lost Ocean, we had to go a little ways from town to get shows, because there weren't too many bands in the area that were similar to us in genre.

Walk me through the songwriting process that takes place for Lost Ocean.
Usually it starts with me and Skyler. We'll get together and maybe I'll have an idea or he'll have an idea, and we end up finishing each other's songs a lot of the time. Like, I might have a chorus without any verses and I'll show it to Skyler, and he'll work on it and add to it, or I might add a bridge to a song he wrote. Everyone in the band but me has studied music in college. Our drummer and bassist get together a lot, so they'll bring some rhythmic ideas to the table and we might work off of that. For the lyrics, we'll normally be working out a song musically, and as we're playing I'll kinda be humming along and have a melody line worked out, and then I'll try and write based on what the sound of the song makes me feel like it should be about. Other times I might have some lyrics already written and we will just fit them to music.

Do you have any memorable experiences from being on the road so far?
Oh yeah! We were driving to a show in Fresno, and we had one of those old conversion vans, with the captain's seats and everything. Well, the van broke down when we were about three miles away from the venue, so we had to push the thing way off the road and onto a side street so we could call and get help. A while later this policeman stops by and is like "What the heck you guys doing out here?" Then he told us that there had been two murders on the street our van was on within the past week. I'm the only guy in the band who is married, but all the guys had their girlfriends with them for that show, so they were all a little freaked out, obviously. We were able to call one of our dads to come tow the van, so we got the girls safe and everything and it was fine. But that was kind of crazy. We were joking after that experience that we were officially a band for real after something like that.

lostoceanmusic.com

Officially a band for real

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WILDERNESS OF TEKOA

BY JEFFREY ELLINGER

'The Christian version'. That dirty phrase has been used as a pejorative spoken in so many disparate circles that they are too myriad to list here, but safe to say, you've heard it. 'The Huntington's, yeah I liked them, they were the Christian Ramones, right?' 'Joe Christmas was nice, the singer sounded like Malkmus and they were a great Christian Pavement.'

The list goes on…Starflyer 59 circa *Silver* was My Bloody Valentine, MxPx/Blink 182, The Blamed/Fugazi, Bleach/Weezer, Living Sacrifice/Meshuggah, Joy Electric/New Order, Ballydowse/The Pogues, The Psalters/Karl Marx, Alice Cooper/Alice Cooper, Calibretto circa *Dead by Dawn*/Murder City Devils fronted by a Gordan Gano and Conor Oberst hybrid played at breakneck speeds. Ok, those last three might be a stretch, but the point remains, Christian music gets branded, often unfairly, as a second-rate clone. Christian bands, even if they temporally preceded their secular counterpart are inevitably accused of aping the band they sonorously match. Up until recently scene giants like Pitchfork and their ilk used Christian bands as their whipping boys and would review albums from Christian artists within a carbon copy context. But with the emergence of darlings like Danielson and Sufjan Stevens and the artists on Sounds Familyre and Asthmatic Kitty it's never been a better time to have Jesus on your side.

Enter Florida's Wilderness of Tekoa. On their debut record for Northern Records Wilderness plays music that could certainly be called the Christian Coldplay, think mostly Coldplay (a big influence on vocalist Nic DiPace) and Keane mixed with a harder Switchfoot-like vocal delivery. Utilizing piano, twirling shimmering guitars, big drums, and soaring vocals Wilderness made on a sound on their first record, *The Skies Pale in Comparison*, that may have originated in the youth group room but seems destined for arenas and stadiums. Lead Guitarist Ryan Antolino says it like this, "we really appreciate music that has dynamics and has depth, so a lot of the music we listen to inspires us to return the favor. Our goal was to be big in sound as well as big in the feel of the music."

Made up of Phil Turner/Drums, Phillip Pattison/Piano and Bass, DiPace/Vocals, and Antonlino/Guitar, Wilderness of Tekoa has made a brave attempt on their first record at creating a record filled with large sounds and big themes. Like on the song "Your Place in the Ground," which starts off as a ballad with searing vocals and backing piano chords and breaks into a pulsating march culminating with the surprisingly scandalous lyric (written by DiPace) 'your dad, he will be home soon/ while your mom is making love in the other room.' It's that kind of refreshing honesty on real life, infidelity in this case, that more bands finding themselves in the Christian music market should be willing to take. Being on Northern is a boon, artistically, to be sure, but Antolino added his take on the band's artistic freedom. "Yes, our label supports the realness, pain, sadness, joy in our music. That's what makes great music. They tell us time after time to be real with our music and let us do what we do." And he also shared about where their place is within the industry. "We don't want to be completely in one or the other, Christian or mainstream. We want everyone to enjoy our music. We want our music to be as bold and challenging as possible. If we do get placed in one or the other we will remain the same and we want to continue to be real and challenging to the listener."

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THIS BEAUTIFUL REPUBLIC

BY MATT CONNER

Five years ago, the last musicians Ben Olin wanted to be playing alongside were the ones he now finds himself surrounded by. Fortunately, they've gotten quite a bit better.

Getting their start playing in different Christian bands in Toledo, Ohio, the members of This Beautiful Republic held polarizing musical interests. "What I knew of their band was that it was basically glorified praise and worship," explains Olin, who serves as the band's vocalist and spokesperson. "My band wasn't like that at all. It was more like a Tooth & Nail type of a style. We never played any shows together, but we just knew about each other."

Funny how a few years can change things. That same worship band changed their name to This Beautiful Republic, wrote some killer melodies and was about to showcase their musical chops in front of several major labels. That is, until their lead singer quit two days prior, leaving the rest of the band high and dry.

Olin didn't think much of it at the time because his own band was having problems, resulting in a split only two weeks after This Beautiful Republic lost its vocalist. But it wasn't until a third party became involved that the dots were connected.

"We had a mutual friend and she had heard some of the demo recordings they had done," explains Olin. "She said that I needed to hear it, but I just said, 'No, that's not my thing. I like stuff that's a little more aggressive.' And she was like, 'No, you really need to listen to it.' So I just said, 'Fine. I'll humor you and listen to a song,' which was called 'Casting Off' and it was amazing. I couldn't believe how far they'd come with their songwriting and was blown away."

After e-mailing Adam Smith, the guitarist of TBR, Olin found himself being interviewed by the band over lunch and it was obvious there was something happening on a spiritual level. "When we look back on it, it's a marvel to us. It's clear that God orchestrated the construction of This Beautiful Republic. It's amazing that He destroyed two bands, put them in the dumps, put me in that band, and then watched it rise up and be ten times better than what it was."

And what does God have in mind with the band He so clearly created? The answer can be found in the mission of the label that signed them – Forefront Records – which as Olin explains, "has been trying to find a band that fits spiritually and musically on Forefront Records, which is a very church-focused type of label. It's tough to find bands for that label that want to go that direction but yet sound good."

Luckily for the label, that is exactly where the band wants to be situated. As Olin believes, "That's us totally. That's what we really feel called to right now. We grew up in the church, so that's what we know the best. We feel for the kids in youth groups and we know where they are coming from."

"We want to grow the business, but we don't want to do it in a place that is not receptive to it," says Olin. "Our first single is called 'Jesus To The World' and to try to go into bars and clubs or try to put that song on mainstream radio, that's just not gonna fly. But at the same time, we feel we have these songs that God has just blessed us with, or blessed period, and if we're diligent with what he has us to do, then we should be fine.

thisbeautifulrepublic.com

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xDEATHSTARx

BY RAND RENFROW

In an industry oversaturated with concerns of the self, xDeathStarx is a breath of fresh air, prevailing by stressing just the opposite: community. Heck, when members of xDeathStarx wanted to include their friends who don't even play instruments, they just created more space for them in the band and added them as vocalists. Boasting four vocalists on their long awaited full length (they have since gone to three), xDeathStarx is unrivaled in the world of hardcore music both in numbers and in straightforwardness. Vocalist and one of the founders of xDeathStarx, Eric Gregson, wasted no time in telling me what xDeathstarx hoped to accomplish as a band.

Before I even conducted an interview with the band, there was something that attracted me to them. Maybe it was their killer name, maybe the intense skull logo on their myspace and t-shirts, or maybe even their blend of hardcore and metal, with just enough southern twang to get you boot-scootin', that lives up to the brutality their name and image conveys. Perhaps it was seeing a video of them playing on Jesse James's Monster Garage, making those dwarves mosh almost a year ago that drew me to them. Regardless, when I interviewed Eric, this appeal was only solidified. As I am fond of xDeathStarx, you can imagine my distress to find that their new album, although it was recorded in May of '06, has been continually pushed back, now set for a February 2007 release. Yet, my stress is nothing compared to what the band went through recording the album. "It was really really hard and really really stressful," Eric said. "Most of us had no money and being in New Jersey for 2 weeks meant we were spending money that we didn't have. It was pretty testing. The best part was hearing everything come together. Worst part was the stress, lack of time and money and our hotel was pretty rank. Corey found a used crack pipe in the room."

xDeathStarx calls Redlands, CA home, which Gregson claims certainly helps hardcore music flourish as people from bands including No Innocent Victim, Bleeding Through, Plague: The Red Letters, and Sleeping Giant also reside there. This environment for musical growth is very similar to what Eric Gregson said his and I assume his brother Ryan's (guitarist in the band) childhood was like. "My mom said when I was like 3 years old I would pull out the Tupperware and pretend it was drums," Eric claimed as he described to me why he personally plays music. He continued with an answer that I believe parallels the message xDeathStarx delivers. "I love it," Eric stated, "I always have… I like creating something that I want to hear. Buildings, cars, machinery, theses are things created by man for the benefit of man. Art, language, philosophy are things created by man that will live and die with the world. Music is the only thing we can create that has existed before the founding of the earth. Its soul purpose for its creation was to bring glory and praise to God. That is why it is so powerful and cuts across all nationalities and through language barriers."

Gregson didn't stop there. He seemed very adamant about the goals of xDeathStarx, "We would like to play as many good shows as possible, but the main thing is that we want to bring glory to God. We want to see people healed and come to know the True Living God through the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ." xDeathStarx comes across to me as a band that definitely conveys a sense of community and is aware of what the world needs. They are very secure in their beliefs and image; a security matched by their talent. I knew there was something I liked about them. They don't sugarcoat anything, which I experienced first hand when Gregson left me with this comment: "There are mainly two types of Christian bands: bands who want to stay in their safe Christian bubble and bands that will tone down what they say about Jesus because they think it will help them get a bigger audience. If God is GOD, do you think you are in control of his blessings? It's time to look to the Lord and to the people that need him, not record sales." Chew on that.

xdeathstarx.com

Chew on that

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WORKING HARD FOR BANDS

FUTURE OF FORESTRY

BY MATTHEW FREEMAN & JOHN J. THOMPSON

"It's like you become half of a person. You feel lost and you have to rebuild." Reflecting on his recent divorce, frontman for former band Something Like Silas, Eric Owyoung, knows what it means to feel hopeless, confused, and broken. In this tragic incident, Owyoung found support and encouragement from friends and family, yet didn't find answers to the questions boiling in his mind. "I couldn't hear God's voice in any of this. I could only hear a lot of people."

So Owyoung went back to the place where he found solace: his writing. "I wrote songs just to write songs," he explained. "I didn't have an agenda." Out of his time of confusion and despair, rose songs for his fifth full length release, *Twilight* (due out January 2007). But this album includes new faces, Luke Floeter (Bass), and Spencer Kim (Drums) along with original bandmate and lead guitarist, Nick Maybury. With a new line-up and a need to move in a new creative direction, the San Diego-based band changed its name to Future of Forestry, drawn from the title of C.S. Lewis' poem that echoed this time of turmoil and change for Owyoung and the band. "The beauty of it is that going through so much pain felt so raw and real", he explained.

And the songs are just that: waves of loud, heavy, honest cries of yearning and unrest, cresting to quiet expressions of simplicity, hope and peace. A lot like *Twilight*, the transition of the day between light and darkness. And Owyoung agrees with that sentiment. "I can't talk about hope and joy without talking about what I came from and showing that contrast."

Tapping into their arsenal of inspiration from the likes of Radiohead, Sigur Ros, Bjork, and U2, and collaborating with long-time producer Ken Andrews (Copeland, Year of The Rabbit, Mae), Future of Forestry has developed a sound that is more anthematic, complex, and passionate than anything on the mainstream Christian music scene. And thanks to a move to indie label, Credential Recordings, the band's exploration of sound transcends any restrictions of a "worship-band" sticker.

Although some songs are congregational in nature ("Gazing" and "Stay Beside Me"), as Owyoung clarified, "that's what we do", Forestry covers the experiences across the whole spectrum of life. From the Simon and Garfunkel inspired ballad about recovering a lost friendship, "If You Find Her," to desperate times ("Sacred Place"), searching for answers ("Speak To Me Gently"), to love ("All I Want") and acceptance ("You and I"), Forestry hopes that their music moves people on a journey, a journey of enjoyment to encounter where truth, beauty, hope, and serenity find their home – in God himself.

futureofforestry.com

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Readers' Poll 2006

Favorite Lyricist

1. **Andrew Schwab** (Project 86)
2. **Aaron Weiss** (mewithoutYou)
3. **Josh Dies** (Showbread)

Favorite Band

1. **mewithoutYou**
2. **Underoath**
3. **Skillet**

Favorite Article

1. **Project 86** (Andrew Schwab)
2. **Showbread** (Rand Renfrow)
3. **Dead Poetic** (David Stagg)

Favorite Album

1. ***Define the Great Line*** (Underoath)
2. ***Age of Reptiles*** (Showbread)
3. ***Comatose*** (Skillet)

Favorite Album Cover

1. ***The Triptych*** (Demon Hunter)
2. ***Brother, Sister*** (mewithoutYou)
3. ***Redeemer*** (Norma Jean)

Favorite Live Show

1. **Disciple**
2. **Showbread**
3. **mewithoutYou**

Readers' Poll 2006

Favorite Singer

1. **Ryan Clark** (Demon Hunter)
2. **Andrew Schwab** (Project 86)
3. **John Cooper** (Skillet)

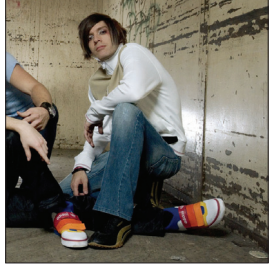
Favorite Guitarist

1. **Tim McTague** (Underoath)
2. **Ben Kasica** (Skillet)
3. **Randy Torres** (Project 86)

Favorite Song 1. "In Regards To Myself" (Underoath) 2. "In A Sweater Poorly Knit" (mewithoutYou) 3. "Comatose" (Skillet)

Favorite New Band

1. Family Force 5
2. Maylene & the Sons of Disaster
3. Red



Favorite Bassist

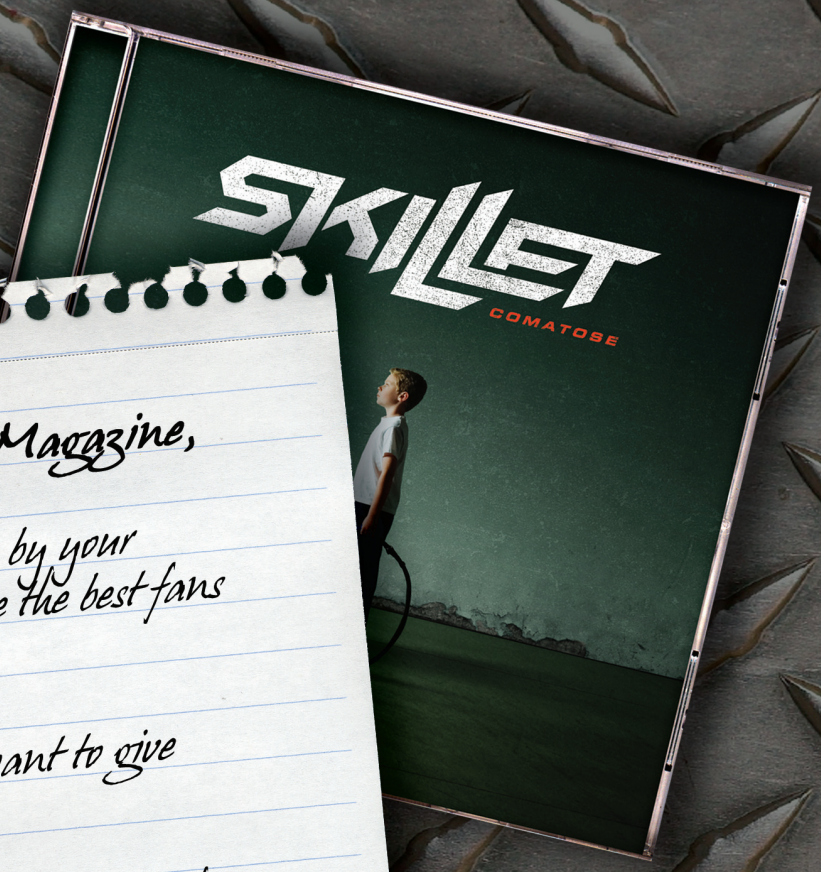
1. **John Cooper** (Skillet)
2. **Steven Dail** (Project 86)
3. **Kalel** (Pillar)

Favorite Drummer

1. **Aaron Gillespie** (Underoath)
2. **Jordan Mancino** (As I Lay Dying)
3. **Ted Kirkpatrick** (Tourniquet)

Favorite Unsigned Band

1. Children 18:3
2. Circus Dawn



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HM THE HARD MUSIC MAGAZINE

MAYLENE AND THE SONS OF DISASTER

Photo: Ryan Russell

RYDER

Maylene & the Sons of
CONCEPTUALLY SPEAKING

BY DAVID STAGG

WHEN DALLAS TAYLOR AND I PLAYED PHONE TAG FOR THE PAST WEEK, IT WAS BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE I'D NEVER TALK TO HIM. WE'D BEEN BACK AND FORTH SO MANY TIMES I PRACTICALLY MEMORIZED HIS OUTGOING VOICEMAIL MESSAGE. "HEY, YOU'VE REACHED DALLAS, LEAVE ME A MESSAGE…" BUT WHEN I DO TALK TO HIM THE FIRST TIME, ANY NEGATIVE FEELINGS TOWARD PHONE LINES AND CELL PHONES AND MESSAGE MACHINES WERE ASSUAGED BY THE FACT THAT DALLAS TAYLOR MIGHT BE THE NICEST GUY OF ALL-TIME.

"I am so sorry about the phone tag thing," he says to me – at least four times. I apologize as well. Time zones are brutal. We agree. He excuses himself and turns down his television. I ask him a question, and his down-home, Southern accent makes everything even nicer.

Taylor, who used to be the vocalist for Underoath, once heard a story about a gang of criminals – four sons and a mother – who went around the country robbing banks and killing and kidnapping people. The leader of this gang, according to the FBI, was the mom, Ma Barker, with her four sons carrying out the dirty deeds. The story always stuck with Taylor, and when he started his first post-Underoath band, he knew the music he would write would circle around this story. Ma became Maylene, and Maylene and the Sons of Disaster was born.

The band he envisioned is now composed of himself and a quintet of cohorts: bassist Roman Havaland, guitarists Scott Collum, Josh Cornutt, and Josh Williams, and drummer Lee Turner. The band released a self-titled debut in late 2005 with five members, and beginning in September 2006, the new line-up entered the studio to record the follow-up chapter, *II*. "We're really excited about it," Taylor tells me. "The first record was written from the concept of the sons talking," Taylor says, "about the sons thinking they were invincible and that nothing could happen to them. This next record is about them dying. It's like the next chapter in the story."

Do you consider your band to be a 'concept' band? Are these 'concept' records?
The first one had a concept to it, but not all the songs on this (second) record are based on the concept; I pretty much write what's been going on in my life. When I write, I try to put myself in those shoes, come up with what goes through people's minds. I've always done that, like, since I was a kid; wonder what someone like Hitler made them think that they were doing right, that they were doing a good cause. Especially the story of Ma Barker. That's where we started the band from. This lady believed – she was a Bible thumper, and she thought she was doing the right thing, and she thought she was raising her kids the right way. It's crazy how someone could get that mindset.

How much of it is a reflection of what's going on in your life at the time, and how much it is you infusing that into the Ma Barker story? Do you feel that may make it less of a concept?
The story's always there; it's still a concept record. The way we put the songs on this record – if you read the songs that circle around the concept, it tells a story. The first song starts out talking from one perspective, and it starts to tell a story until the very end. The last song on the record is an instrumental song; there are no vocals on the track, but there are lyrics written to it. You can read the lyrics as you're looking through the booklet, listening to the song.

Do you ever get negative feedback for the type of story you base your band around?
It's a little different. Even beliefs wise. People always wonder, 'Why do you portray that?' Well, we're actually portraying… 'You think you got it made,' you know? It's more blatant than I've ever been with who I am. It's like, 'You think you're invincible and hurt other people, and God's going to hand you over to the world, let the enemy have their way with you.'

Taylor starts and stops his sentences a whole lot. He'll randomly pause sometimes, probably sifting through his thoughts for answers. He has a solid Southern accent; he's from Birmingham, Alabama. When he was younger, his grandfather used to take him to re-enactments of the legendary four-hour shootout between Ma Barker, her sons, and the FBI that eventually ended in her and her youngest son's deaths. It drew him in; the story of retribution and divine justice and 'what comes around, goes around' stuck with him. And while Taylor never thought he'd be in the greatest band ever, he certainly knew two things when he started this band: 1) It would be about Ma Barker, and 2) it would be fun.

"When we started the band, for us, we never thought we'd be the best band alive. We wanted to build a story. We wanted to have fun with it. We leave it open to go as many places as we can."

And while Taylor and Ma Barker may not have the same moral code (to my knowledge, Taylor's never killed a man), there is one thing I can guarantee Taylor can endorse from her. On her tombstone, it's written: "The darkest night shall end in bright day."

"I wrote (this record) a lot about what was going on at the time, but I try to leave it open to where anyone can take anything from it," Taylor says, "to where anyone can make their own story from it. I always want to write to where whatever someone else is going through – even if I'm not going through it – they can take (our songs) and hear it and they can help them get through."

✖

Photo: Ryan Russell

Disaster

ANBERLIN

Anberlin

WE THE WANDERERS

BY STEPHEN CHRISTIAN

LESS HASTY AM I THAN THE WIND,
YET I MUST GO.
WE WANDERERS,
EVER SEEKING THE LONELIER WAY,
BEGIN NO DAY WHERE WE HAVE ENDED ANOTHER DAY;
AND NO SUNRISE FINDS US WHERE SUNSET LEFT US.
EVEN WHILE THE EARTH SLEEPS WE TRAVEL.
-*THE PROPHET* BY KAHLIL GIBRAN.

Introductions seem out of place here at Richards Coffee Shop, the only coffee shop in this little town. For the most part, everyone around here knows each other by face – if not by name. Out of place or not, I'm Stephen, vocalist of the band Anberlin, and am self admittedly addicted to the iced coffee. Another rain cloud just trudged across the overcast Florida sky; and, for being the sunshine state, it hasn't lived up to its name here as of late. It's not usually like this in Winter Haven, Florida. The only thing that really changes in this small town is the influx of grey haired drivers that seem to consume the roadways at a rather lackadaisical pace in the winter. Maybe that is where the story of Anberlin begins, in this small inactive town where the city nightcrawlers only have very few choices for a weekend social, namely mugs and movies or the 24-hour Denny's. Out of a jejune town a small scene was formed from which the likes of Copeland, Underoath, and Anberlin would be conceived. At the time the roots of Anberlin were starting to take hold, we were not even old enough to get a driver's license, confined to this "imperial" Polk county.

I first encountered Deon (Rexroat) in 1994. He was playing bass and singing for a punk band, called "I'm Not Sure," at Friar Tucks, the local venue and tavern. The band's cover of Nena's "99 Red Balloons" was an optimal fit, since Deon was only 13 years old and could reach the range of Nena herself. Being that Deon was in the "punk rock scene," and I in the "surf" crowd at the local middle school, we didn't have much contact. A year later, however, we were introduced by a fellow musician and immediately became friends, and shortly after that started playing music together. At the time I played guitar, which after learning a mere three chords was dumbfounded as to where to go from there (God bless the Lord for power chords), so I dropped the guitar and stuck to the microphone.

Due to my lackluster performance on 6 strings, Deon introduced Joseph (Milligan) to the current 3 piece. This was a much needed addition, considering that we had only a drummer, bass player, and a singer. By 1996 I was in my first official band, and though we tried desperately to sound like Gainesville, Florida's Hot Water Music, we fell dismally short. But, in spite of our shortcomings, we ended up signing with an inadequate Southern California label, which in turn sold a breathtaking 1,300 records before our inevitable demise.

In 2001, with the end of the band in sight, we began playing shows with a Tampa-based band called "Bottlerocket," a three-piece punk rock band with potential and a "prodigy" drummer. While watching the prolific 13 year-old drummer, I remember my mouth agape when I first heard the enormity that is Nathan Young. Our drummer was leaving the band to get married and we convinced Nathan to fill in for the remaining time. He has yet to leave.

From the ashes of several local bands rose Anberlin, and we immediately went to Matt Goldman (Underoath/Copeland) to record the few songs we had developed during the rebuilding phase. The reaction to the three songs on the internet was astounding, within only a couple of months our purevolume site had accumulated 25,000 hits and was attracting the attention of several major labels. Being that we had known Tooth and Nail A&R (guy) Chad Johnson from his Takehold Records days (238/Legends of Rodeo) he contacted us as a possible label interest. Chad came to check out a show of ours in Atlanta, Georgia, which turned out to be one of the most catastrophic shows of our lives.

We were sandwiched right in between hardcore acts Underoath and headliner Norma Jean – two bands we had shared the stage with numerous times, but had no right to be performing with in our then pop-indie rock form. Needless to say, Chad told Brandon Ebel, President of Tooth and Nail, that they should not sign us; because our performance that night was deplorable, and, in retrospect, I agree. Chad Johnson concurs: "Anberlin has certainly grown into a powerfully energetic and mature live act since the first time I witnessed them live. To be polite to a band that I love and work with on a daily basis, let's just say that I was not impressed! Alright, I'll just give it away ... I thought the band was terrible live. I was so disappointed that I called Brandon and recommended that he not sign them! Thankfully, their demos were so solid that we signed them anyway. Look at what years of non-stop touring has done!" Brandon and Chad took a chance on us, and in spring of 2002 we signed to Tooth and Nail, and in 2003 came out with our first record, *Blueprints For The Blackmarket*.

The inception years of the band were jagged for Anberlin. Finances and internal strife were always the nemesis for the then tenderfoot band. There was a point where giving up seemed to be the logical next step; we had our trailer stolen with thousands of dollars worth of merch and equipment taken the day before our first tour; once on tour we had to sleep in the van, because we could not afford hotel rooms; and more than once we had to have our parents wire us money just to keep gas in the tank. But, the low of the band came right before the recording of the second record, entitled *Never Take Friendship Personal*.

The rhythm guitarist had ulterior motives for the band: sex, drugs, & rock and roll in every sense of the word. He became an infection to the rest of the band, and the joy of playing shows and writing music became more of a chore than a privilege. I remember one of our first tours was with Further Seems Forever and the Movielife in 2003. Upon hearing this news, most members of a new and unknown band would be elated at the opportunity to tour for a month and a half straight with such outstanding bands. Instead I mumbled something under my breath in contempt for having to spend that amount of time in such close quarters with someone I loathed so much. To work so hard to try to set a good example, to try

to stand up for my faith and then have someone so closely associated to you participate in illegal activities, get us nearly kicked off a tour for attempting to fight a female security guard and then almost getting arrested, was wearing us thin. Especially me. Deon explains: "We got to a point where the four of us (Nathan, Stephen, Joey and myself) were heading in one direction and (the former guitarist) was heading in another. After a while, having a personality on tour that was so different from ours caused issues and arguments, we decided it was best to part ways and try to save a spiraling friendship than destroy ourselves and the band."

After a few failed attempts at replacing the guitarist, Anberlin finally decided on (Nathan) Strayer in 2004. Strayer was a guitarist from a Tampa, Florida-based hardcore band, "The Mosaic," and childhood friends with Nathan Young. The band finally seemed to have the missing piece of the puzzle in place.

Anberlin are not considered local heroes here in modest Winter Haven, population 26,000 or so. We cherish the anonymity of small town life. In all reality, the only real celebrities in a southern town like this are stereotypically country musicians and Dale Earnhardt. Tight jeans, long hair, and piercing are grounds for a fight of some type. It is a great town to be from, and the fact that it never seems to change is its most redeeming quality for us, considering we don't see it ten months out of the year. This last journey for us wanderers took us away from home for 5 1/2 months; which included the recording of our latest album, *Cities*, in Seattle, Washington, and 3 different tours (Story Of The Year, Hawthorne Heights, & Yellowcard).

Life on the road is not always the most glamorous of lifestyles that it is sometimes made out to be. In fact, at moments it feels to the band as if we relive each day over and over. Wake up in a new city, unload gear, walk around city, play show, shake hands, load gear, drive, repeat. I liken it to the movie *Groundhog Day*; and, after a couple months, your brain begins to turn off. Spending twenty-four hours a day with the same people can really take a toll on relationships and even the smallest incident can set someone off, and seeing as that we travel with twelve people now means there is no privacy or solitude.

Deon's response reflects us all when he responded to the question – "What do you hate about being on the road so much?" – when he replied, "Nothing! I love playing music so much that I can deal with the minor inconveniences. I get stressed from time to time about certain things, like time away from home, but that is part of the life I chose, so I can handle it." The positives far outweigh the negatives of being in a band. Creating music has been a life-long dream for several of us.

"I knew what I wanted to do from 11 years old on. It was the only sure thing that I had," Joseph Milligan said. "No one could tell me it wouldn't happen." Joseph's life revolves around music. In the time spent off tour, Joseph is known to lock himself in his room with the bare essentials to sustain life and not come out until several songs are completed – down to the drums, bass, and keyboard, which he typically borrows from his younger sister. "I think (songwriting) takes any extreme emotion. Happiness, sadness, anger – even boredom, really. You can't force a song. Every song has a feel to it. You know when it needs to change and shift."

Lyrically, I must mirror Joey when he says, "It takes extreme emotion ... you can't just force a song." Each song, especially on this next record, I have written and re-written at least 20 times each and still I am not always satisfied. I try to write out of my own experiences and keep a personal journal and an online journal (modesty.blogspot.com) of situations and circumstances so that when it is time to begin to write a song I can recall every second of the experience. If solitude is the furnace of transformation, then this album lyrically is a complete metamorphosis. *Cities* is the most autobiographical, introspective, and spiritual record I have ever written.

When spirituality arrives in a "Christian interview," inevitably and redundantly people still want to know if Anberlin is a Christian entity; and once again I answer and have to explain myself, with the high hopes that this will be the last time we ever have to answer the question. I leave it to the listener to call it what they must. For me, though, I adhere to Colossians, when Paul said, "and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (sing) with gratitude in your hearts to God." I always find the question of "Christian band" a bit perplexing, to say the least. At moments it feels like people are more concerned with the product that they consume than the souls behind the music. No one has ever asked me about my relationship with God, they simply want to know if we classify our songs neatly into the sub-genre known as "Christian rock." I personally agree with philosopher Jon Foreman when he said, "God is much

more interested in how I treat the poor, broken, and hungry than the personal pronouns I use when I sing."

Anberlin has decided as a band that to "change the world," is more than just a song off our first album, but a decision we want to see through. We have continued to work with organizations such as World Vision, and supported the *Take Action Tour*, which focused on suicide prevention. In 2006 Nathan, Seth Cain (the tour manager), and myself went to Meno, Haiti to spend two weeks working with local villagers and school systems. Though the trip was challenging and demanding at times, the accomplishments and adventures we had while serving others was unforgettable and something we wanted others to experience as well.

Because we wanted to share with others the experiences we had in Haiti, members from Anberlin, Underoath, Showbread, and The Classic Crime are going to Calcutta, India in January to work with victims of the sex trade with an organization called TEN. We hope to begin building a community center, so these women can begin to make t-shirts, bracelets, and other such articles of clothing to generate an income to keep them from returning to the streets. Our faith is the motivation to venture out into the world and help the widows and orphans in places like Haiti & India, and we are already planning a trip to Africa in early 2008.

Our faith has shown through our lyrics on previous albums, but neither has given such an accurate account of the depth of personal relationship as *Cities*. The song "Uncanny" completely defines the romance with grace and mercy. "For me personally, He has to be in everything," Nathan Young exclaims. "If God is the most important thing in my life, then it should show through every aspect of my life. Since God is a part of who I am, He's with me in my music profession."

Thus is born *Cities*, the self-proclaimed "pinnacle of all Anberlin records." Though I am not comparing us to the bands, I think that *Cities* is our *Ok Computer* or *London Calling* – the album that all others from our catalog will be compared to. (*Cities*) is the record we wanted to make from the beginning. With *Blueprints* and *Friendship*, we were in a total building process trying to focus ourselves and write songs we were happy with. "It was an uphill battle most times," Deon stated. "*Cities* was different from the start. From the moment the first song ("Godspeed") was written, we were comfortable with our direction and from the first day of recording to the last, we never got to a point where we felt like we weren't accomplishing what we wanted to with this album." Nathan Young agreed, "*Cities,* to me, is the record that has taken us two records to make. It's ... more than ever, Anberlin. I'm not bashing our other records, by any means! I just think we were really able to spend time together, making a record that we all love – front to back."

The album was recorded late summer in resplendent Seattle, Washington – home to the genius that is Aaron Sprinkle, who produced the previous two records. "I really believe that the guys as individual musicians really found themselves on this record," Aaron said recently in an interview for the album's DVD. The Compound studio has been the only home Anberlin has ever known in their recording history; and, while some may complain that this is the safe route, we felt that Aaron was growing as a producer alongside Anberlin growing as a band. Each record sounds completely different from the last, and *Cities* is no exception.

Simply the introduction to the CD sets the mood for the entire record and distinguishes itself from the other previous two releases, with its 1-minute, 26-second intro of layered guitar and an ominous buildup to the first song. "Godspeed" engages the listener as soon as the swell of the guitars reaches its summit. The entire album then maintains this anthematic and anticipative charge that never seems to stop. "*Cities* is everything I have ever wanted to do," guitarist Joseph Milligan says. "The music on the record is my every angry moment, every despondent outburst, and everything that amazes me about life. I put everything I had into the music. Nathan and Deon just put the icing on it ... Stephen stepped it up and never ceases to amaze me in how his lyrics and melodies fit the music I write so perfectly."

The question now is where does Anberlin go after *Cities*? "I cook all the time, so maybe I could be a chef and open my own restaurant," Deon visualizes. "I would love to produce, and of course keep writing music. As long as music is in my life I will be happy," Joey admitted. "I'd like to be a mortgage broker and work with my pops and his company," Nathan Young said of his future. As for myself, life is going to consist of a couple more years of school, and hopefully land somewhere in the medical field. But none of these subsequent dreams are going to happen for some time, for now we wanderers are content exploring the globe as the world creaks slowly ahead, driving the highways while the earth sleeps, and beginning no day where we have ended the last one.

Relient K

MATT THIESSEN PIMPS OUT RELIENT K

BY BRIAN QUINCY NEWCOMB

Sitting down backstage at the Pageant in St. Louis, the city's premier live music venue, the 5 members of Relient K shuffle into their dressing room as if on their way to the principal's office. Within hours, the 6 band tour put together by Nintendo to convince young people to try out their new game system will be rocking the walls, so it's best to chat now. Even then my ancient recorder did a shabby job.

Together in one space, there's a democratic quality in Relient K's interactions, yet the band known for "tongue in cheek" songs with a penchant for comic wit is coming off more than a little tired and uncertain. While they're all chipper, pitching in here and there, telling me about the new album and working with producer Howard Benson, how it feels to be one of those bands that walks that awkward tightrope between the demands of the Christian music paradigm and playing the mainstream rock club we're sitting in, I'm eager to shake them up a bit. If they were not going to make me laugh and give me entertaining quotes for the readers of HM, I guess it's up to me to push them out of their comfort zones.

For all the band chat and banter, I pointed out, all the songs are written by Matt Thiessen, who brings them to the band in completed form to be learned with little room for collaboration or contribution. So, I wondered out loud, to newest member guitarist Jon Schneck if that "makes you Matt's (insert word for female dog here)?" As the laughter subsides, Schneck turns to bassist John Warnes, to say, "actually, I think that's the exact wording on my contract."

Okay, since everyone knows Matt Thiessen is the brains and voice of Relient K, I'll get to the phoner I did with him back as the record was in the final stages of recording. First, I wanted to talk about the delicate balance of being a Christian band with some mainstream success, and the inherent tensions.

"I hope this doesn't come across as pretentious," explains Thiessen, "but we've been fortunate enough to do things the way I think they should be done. And it's not solely on our part, but I don't think bands should be cornered into only singing about their faith, or only being able to play to people that share their beliefs.

" We're by no means pioneers of this… I love to give props to P.O.D., Switchfoot, and Sixpence None the Richer, all those people that have been able to have some radio success so that people that are not necessarily Christians can listen to the songs and be like, yeah, that's a cool song and the lyrics are really positive and it makes me feel good, but at the same time they're not feeling like somebody's trying to cram a belief system down their throat.

"That's the beauty of art. There have been lots of painters and visual artists in the past who come from very religious influences that have been very appealing to secular culture, and I don't see why music should be any different.

Thiessen suggests that he's been influenced by Christian writers who take a broader view of the world: "From a spiritual perspective authors like Donald Miller (Blue Like Jazz) and Brennan Manning (The Ragamuffin Gospel), who address Christian culture without all this isolation thing going on, they are not about maintaining this Christian bubble. The way they approach their faith is very credible and it fits the culture, so that people outside the faith can respect what they are saying.

"That's what we try to do with our music; we love singing about what we believe in, it gives us a lot of satisfaction to be singing about what's in our heart. We try to do it in a way so that folk aren't thinking, 'oh, here comes that preaching band again.' I think there is a place in music for that, if a band wants to call themselves a ministry and play churches and parents can know going in that its going to have this religious focus. But that's not something that I feel I can really do. I'm not a great speaker, I'm not the most theologically educated person out there, but I can talk about what I've gone through as a kid, and what's in my heart, and have other folk to relate to that. Sometimes, these kind of introspective thoughts on life can impact people in a different way."

But, as I suspected, there is the occasional critical email, says Theissen, and his response is that they are doing what they believe is right. "It's like, we've always been who we've been and are now. When we get 'you've changed,' or 'we don't like your values,' I'm quick to remind them that there are lots of options, they don't need to bring their kids to our show if they don't like where it's held. There's something for everybody."

More and more though, Relient K's eyes have been turned toward the larger mainstream marketplace, success has taken them farther than perhaps anyone has expected, and there's some pressure to make music that will sell records. "Bands like us are a dime a dozen," Theissen admits, "so we've got to do everything we can to make it interesting."

As one would anticipate, however, Relient K's stayed with what works. "It's shaping up to be a melodic record. It's not going to be too different from our past stuff. We've always had a pop melody thing going on. There's enough things that we haven't done as a band to make it interesting, and yet there's enough continuity from previous stuff that we're not going to throw anybody off."

Which brings us to the thing – beyond a smart power-pop sensibility – that makes Relient K a fun band to follow: the humor they pack into their compact pop rock songs. "A big influence is Pete Townshend (The Who)," says Theissen, "back when rock n' roll was in its infancy, he was coming up with lyrics that nobody had done before. It was thought-provoking, and very witty and funny. It was cool to hear someone able to do that. Some folk may appreciate the more ambiguous emo-lyric, but I like to take on something that might be dark and turn it into something lighter."

But there's also this growing up thing, which has meant that the songs on the last two records are more apt to deal with mature themes, like "Life After Death and Taxes" and the eleven-minute opus "Death Bed" that closes out *Five Score…*

For a record that is destined to receive greater secular scrutiny, then, it's interesting to Theissen that initial responses are that the disc is outspokenly Christian in content. "People who have heard rough mixes have told us it's our most spiritual record thus far. Now I don't intentionally try and plug in spiritual jargon, we've never done that, so this is just what's coming out right now."

"One of the things that's different, is that I have a personal relationship with a girl that comes through positively in the lyrics. Last time (making *Mmhmm*), I had a girlfriend, but it wasn't working out. I've never wanted to write traditional "love songs," it's sort of taboo for me, but there are two or three songs on this record that are very positive about the kind of influence she has on me and the relationship. Maybe it's a little sappy, I don't know, but it's a conscious effort to write songs that take as much from the positive things in my life and not just the negative things that have inspired me more in the past. So, there're probably more positive songs on this record, even more than the last one, which is good."

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Haste The Day

STEADFAST AMIDST THE PRESSURE

BY ANDREW SCHWAB

EXACTLY ONE YEAR AGO, HASTE THE DAY WAS IN THE MIDST OF A DIFFICULT TRANSITION THAT MANY BANDS FACE. AS THEIR CAREER WAS BEGINNING TO GAIN SPEED, A KEY MEMBER WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE THE BAND (THEIR VOCALIST, JIMMY RYAN). BOTH A GOOD FRIEND AND A PIVOTAL PART OF THEIR LIVE SHOW (AS WELL THE WRITING PROCESS), THE THOUGHT OF REPLACING HIM WAS DAUNTING. MANY BANDS IN THIS SITUATION HAVE FALTERED, LOST FOCUS, OR EVEN ENDED. BUT THIS BAND CHOSE TO CONFRONT THE SITUATION WITH STEADFAST PRAYER AND SEEKING OF THE LORD. HE ANSWERED (AND IN SPADES) IN THE FORM OF A NEW FRONTMAN, STEVEN KEECH.

What ensued was a golden chapter for the band, and one that can only be chalked up to divine provision. Not only did they embark on several very successful tours (including one with metal powerhouse Bleeding Through) and also see a continued, steady growth in their fanbase, but the addition of Keech brought a return to the very fundamentals that brought the band together in the first place: fellowship with one another, unabashed presentation of faith, and a commitment to progressive, evolutionary sonics in heavy music.

Now, on the eve of the release of their third LP, *Pressure the Hinges*, guitarist Brennan Chaulk and Steven Keech took the time to reflect over the events of the past twelve months with me...

Schwab: Let's talk about the transition of coming into this band, relieving former vocalist Jimmy Ryan:

Steven: I had just graduated high school in 2006 and I was working at Chili's. I had a local band I was in and we were just playing around town, but not much else. It just didn't seem like things were going the way they were supposed to. So, I prayed and asked God for some new direction. Shortly after I got a call from Jason (guitarist from HTD). I was surprised to get the call, frankly. My band had played with them and they got my number, though I didn't think much of it. They then just asked me to fill in for them in Europe. I had said no initially, because of my band, but I guess I was just missing what God was telling me. It was a tough decision, but I decided to give it a try without even knowing those guys very well. There were 300 kids per show, which was insane to me. It was like a dream. Are you kidding? One moment I was working at Chili's, not knowing where my life was headed, and the next I was in Europe playing to packed rooms with a great band! I kind of freaked out internally those first few shows, because it was so perfect, but I was trying not to act like a little kid who just got his favorite thing for Christmas in front of the guys in the band while they were still deciding whether or not I was officially 'in.'

When did you know this was what you were supposed to do?

Steven: In December of last year my Dad, who is a pastor (I always look to him for advice)... He was like, 'You know this is what God wants you to do, right?' This was even before I went to Europe with the band. I didn't know if it was going to work out. The first show we played, it just fit perfectly. It wasn't awkward ... I was pretty nervous, but I just felt at home immediately.

Brennan: It was scary finding someone new who would fit the band. We were praying about it for quite awhile. Then we saw Steven with his band, and we knew he was special. How he interacted with the fans and the crowd was rare – it takes someone with a unique talent to captivate a crowd like he does. He had energy and genuine passion, not only for fans, but also for Christ. And he had a great ability to not only scream, but sing as well, and pull it off live. We love Jimmy so much, and he is our great friend still, so finding someone to replace him wasn't going to be easy. But this was just ... right.

So, talk to me about the new album. In the past, you guys have patented your version of metal hardcore. Machine-gun breakdowns, blastbeats, etc. How have you expanded on the new material, and was the recording process difficult with the new member?

Steven: When I was going up there, I had this preconceived idea that it was going to be stressful, that I was going to kill my voice and that it would be nerve-racking. But it was very freeing throughout and relaxed, surprisingly. The record itself is heavier, but with more singing. There's much more variety, but still plenty of breakdowns. We still give the kids what they want, but I think we will give a wider variety of kids what they want. It's a little darker musically, but more catchy.

The disc as a whole is based upon the idea of tension, about dealing with situations that force you to make a decision. For example, 'Stitches' is a song about when you see a friend destroying their life and you don't say anything, so your mouth becomes stitched. 'Pressure the Hinges,' the title track, is about running away from life and not turning to God or your friends in the midst of difficulty. The final song, 'Chorus of Angels,' has a lyric I am especially excited about: "Chorus of angels destroy my silence that haunts me / It claims me while darkness walks beside me." It's about Isaiah 6, where God is surrounded by Seraphim.

Brennan: When we started writing, Steven was already journaling and working on ideas. It meant so much to him to be ahead of the game. He took alot of time preparing his mind, and putting in overtime, which made us very excited. His lyrics were very deep, thoughtful, and unique. But I write the lyrics that I sing, so I wondered how we would work together. We meshed very well, and it made it so much fun to record. Steven wrote a couple songs musically as well. He deserves alot of credit for that.

I really appreciate hearing a story like this, to see that things can work out with situations that seem beyond our control. Your band has been together for some time now, and just the fact that you are still here is a strong testimony. Did you ever think you would come this far?

Brennan: We had very small expectations when we started, but God continued to bless us. We have grown steadily throughout our career, but in this past year we have grown closer as friends. We are the closest we have ever been as a band, which is amazing. As far as the music goes, when people hear the record there will be no question we have evolved and especially vocally. The lyrics are more mature and creative. Finally, and most importantly, we have definitely grown in our faith. Our reason for doing this is to be out there and let people know that Jesus loves them and that God is real. We aren't shying away from our faith either on record or on stage.

Pressure the Hinges drops March 20.

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Cool Hand Luke

WAKING UP TO FRESH FIRE

BY AMY E. HALL

COOL HAND LUKE IS ALIVE AND WELL. THAT'S WHAT MARK NICKS, THE BAND'S VOCALIST/PIANIST/DRUMMER, WANTS FANS TO KNOW. TO THAT END, FLOODGATE RECORDS IS RELEASING *THE BALANCING ACT*, THE ROCK TRIO'S FIRST ALBUM IN THREE YEARS, ON FEBRUARY 20.

The record will feature a mix of old songs – some of which are out of print – and brand new tracks. "We want to let people know that we are still around and to let them hear a sample of what is to come," explains Nicks, the sole remaining member of the original lineup.

CHL has seen its share of changes in the last few years. Following *The Fires of Life Tour* in 2004, the band took a year-and-a-half sabbatical, as guitarist Chris Susi relocated and got married, and bassist Brandon Morgan went back to school. During that time, Nicks returned to the workforce, toured as a fill-in drummer for a couple of bands, and did a good bit of soul searching. "It was good to see that my identity was not in my music or a job or in anything other than the fact that I am a child of God," he confesses in the extensive liner notes he wrote for *Balancing*.

Since then, feeling God's purposes for the music of CHL afresh, Nicks has been writing, touring and recording with his new bandmates, (and) long-time friends of the band – Joey Holman and Casey McBride, on guitar and bass respectively.

Balancing will serve as both a cap on CHL's past and a launching pad for the band's future. "It seemed appropriate to stop and take a look back, since it is the end of an era for Cool Hand Luke, in a sense," notes Nicks.

He remembers the day that he first discussed the notion of Cool Hand Luke. "I met Brandon (Morgan) and Jason (Hammil) in 1998 at a Ruby Tuesday in Murfreesboro, TN the night before the last exam of my freshman year at Middle Tennessee State University. The first thing they said to me was, 'Do you play drums?'" Even though Nicks was not at all interested in playing for the proposed Christian punk band, he found himself calling Morgan the following week.

What ensued over time was a strong bond of brothers – in faith and friendship – as they developed as men and as musicians. Needless to say, the guys began what started out as a punk band. In October 1998, the three-piece recorded a four-song demo cassette, *Demo Schmemo*. "Hopefully, you haven't heard it and hopefully you never will," Nicks says, half jokingly and half seriously.

"(Morgan) originally was singing and I was just playing drums…it didn't take long for us to figure out that we didn't really want to be a pop-punk band and our music started getting a little more, I guess, serious-sounding." As the band evolved, Nicks started singing some background vocals, then some lead vocals and later adopted the dueling role of drummer/lead vocalist.

CHL released an EP entitled *…So Far* in 1999, and a full length, *I Fought Against Myself*, in 2001, both independent projects. In 2002, Vindicated Records released two of the band's tunes as a seven-inch vinyl.

They hit the road in a 25-year-old van and toured during summer breaks. "Those days birthed the best memories I have of Cool Hand Luke," Nicks recalls. He has a memory bank full of "stories about staying in a house that was so gross we drove through a tornado just to leave it; stories about [manager] Joe Creep putting the WRONG water bottle on stage so that I took a big gulp of my urine after our first song, and lots and lots of other stories."

With records and tours under its belt, CHL started looking at record labels. Copeland's Aaron Marsh told Nicks about Floodgate Records. "He told me that some guy from The Prayer Chain started a label and that Denison Marrs just signed." CHL was impressed that Floodgate's website had a mission statement on it. "I think we called Denison Marrs and asked them to put in a good word for us or something and sent the two songs from our seven-inch to Tim Taber" – Floodgate's president, formerly of The Prayer Chain – "and he was interested, and he came (to Nashville) for GMA and we met with him." CHL signed with Floodgate in June of 2002.

CHL's national debut, *Wake Up, O Sleeper*, was produced by Christian rock veteran Steve Hindalong of The Choir and released March 2003. The record was a bittersweet step for the band, as Hammil had tearfully explained two months prior that he needed to leave the band due to his plans to relocate and marry. He toured through the Cornerstone Festival that summer and Susi joined the band a few weeks thereafter. He had been a friend of the band for several years.

Hindalong produced CHL's sophomore Floodgate album, as well, with the help of his *City on a Hill* co-producer Marc Byrd (formerly of Common Children). *The Fires*

of Life was released the summer of 2004 and CHL toured virtually non-stop for the next six months. But the passion that once ignited the band's purpose had become a flicker. "We spoke to each other less and less, and I usually had a condescending tone when I did speak to them," admits Nicks. "I was depressed. I think we all were." The last show Morgan, Nicks and Susi played together was in November of 2004, which was followed by the band's aforementioned year-and-a-half hiatus. This past February, Nicks felt a prompting to pick up where they left off.

Today, with fresh perspective, Nicks reflects on the history of CHL. *Balancing* will afford the band a chance to share some of that history with new and old fans alike. "I get lots of e-mails about the old songs that we put out on our own [independently] and people always want to know how they can get them," he notes. "Since they are out of print, I always have to tell them to look on eBay or burn it from a friend." Among the mix of new and old Floodgate tracks, *Balancing* will feature "Case of Emergency" from *...So Far*, "10 or 40" and "Sideways" from *I Fought Against Myself*, and "A Thank You" from the band's seven-inch.

Balancing is also, no doubt, a hint of things to come from CHL. "We're writing tons of new material … we'll be touring a lot in 2007; we'll be playing new and old songs." Also new, Nicks has officially made the transition from drummer/vocalist to frontman/pianist, though he will continue to play drums on CHL's records.

One thing that hasn't changed, however, is the band's vision. "Our goals have not changed any. The heart of Cool Hand Luke is exactly the same – we want to glorify God and we want to worship through our music, and lead people, encourage people and just bring truth," states Nicks.

Faithful fans of CHL know just how much that purpose has fueled the band in the past. Now, after a period of "hibernation," Nicks has been awakened by new passion to continue the call of Cool Hand Luke. "What we want to do is show people the real Jesus – Who loves them and can set them free."

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URBAN D

A CURIOUS BLEND

BY BRENTEN GILBERT

"I'm getting my hair done, so I've got a couple hours to talk."

As Pastor Tommy Kyllonen settles into his seat and prepares to have his corn rolls attended to, I sit on the other end of the phone thinking about what an odd picture this might be for those unfamiliar with Kyllonen's work. And as he began to describe his church, Crossover Church in Tampa, Florida, I got a greater sense of what a unique position he's in.

"The facilities don't really look like your average church," begins Kyllonen. "We have a lot of graphite murals - real vibrant and bright. We have light boxes (illuminated from the back) up all around that have different pictures and urban, hip-hop style artwork in them - some of them have scripture in them." He continues, "When people walk on the campus, they are like, 'Wow! This is really cool looking, but it doesn't look like a church.'"

The services at Crossover are also quite different than what one might expect of typical Sunday morning fare. "With worship, we actually have a live DJ on turntables," he explains. "Our worship team sings a lot of original songs - they've produced a couple of CDs as resources for other churches as well," continues Kyllonen. "They'll also sing some of the regular choruses that other churches will sing, but [they're] kind of remixed with a different flavor." This flavor often includes a rapper or two adding a few verses to the mix as a unique element of the experience.

The sermons are done topically, usually as part of a series, intentionally talking "about real issues that people are struggling with." Using original short films, songs, drama, testimonies, panel discussions, and other forms of artistic expression, the church tackles topics like MySpace, "Sexplotation" and "The DaVinci Code" to help its congregants grow. "Our mission," states Kyllonen, "is to relevantly introduce the truth of Christ to the hip-hop culture as we develop worship, purpose unity and leadership in their lives."

To avoid a myriad of questions, Pastor Tommy doesn't refer to Crossover Church as a "hip-hop church," but he does admit that their target audience is those who are influenced by hip-hop. "I'm originally from Philly and I grew up in a pastor's home," shares Kyllonen. "But I also grew up having a big interest in the hip-hop culture [because] that was all around me."

In his late teens, after what he describes as "straying away from God," Kyllonen recommitted his life to God and found himself enrolled in a Bible college. "At first, I didn't know why," he says of his college days. "Then, in the midst of [Bible college], I really felt a desire to go back and reach the culture that I was from and really translate the message of Christ."

That desire eventually led Kyllonen to Crossover to start a youth ministry program. The church was only a few years old itself when Pastor Tommy and his wife began developing a hip-hop oriented youth ministry, the first of its kind. "We did a lot of things to reach out to that crowd," he explains. "[We had] concerts, basketball leagues, classes to teach kids how to rap, DJ, and dance - all of those different kinds of things." Adding to his credibility, impact and busy schedule, Kyllonen also began recording and touring rap projects of his own, under the pseudonym, Urban Disciple (now Urban D).

After six years as youth pastor and shortly after releasing his biggest album to date, *The Tranzlation* (2001, Seventh Street Records), Kyllonen was approached with the opportunity to take over as lead pastor of Crossover Church. Though hesitant at first, Pastor Tommy eventually assumed the role in 2002 and asked God to help him determine the right direction in which to lead the church.

"[God] made it clear that He wanted us to reach people who were influenced by hip-hop culture," he shares. However, with no examples to follow, Pastor Tommy and his wife were left with a lot of questions. "[We wondered if] this could really work," confesses Kyllonen. "It worked well with the youth ministry and there were some young adults attending [the church] as well," he continues. Still, they weren't certain that a hip-hop focus could work as the whole vision for the ministry.

Despite their doubts, however, the ministry of Crossover Church has been fruitful. Much like the youth ministry, which grew from an average weekly attendance of four to one hundred and fifty, the church has also grown from forty to over four hundred. "About 60-70% of the people who attend didn't previously go to church," adds Kyllonen. "So what we've experienced is really true church growth. We're reaching people who didn't have a relationship with Christ before - who weren't active in a faith community."

Kyllonen's latest endeavor is a book, *Unorthodox*, which details his personal journey, explains the origins of hip-hop and shares the history of Crossover Church. The title, shared by a companion CD, is derived from Pastor Tommy's philosophy of ministry. "Our approach needs to be unorthodox," he explains, "but what we believe in, our doctrine needs to stay the same." He adds, "We should engage culture, rather than fear it."

So while the picture of a pastor sporting corn rolls and rapping might seem odd at face value, for Tommy Kyllonen and Crossover Church, it's how real ministry looks.

✖

BEATS

[hip-hop news 'n' reviews by SphereofHipHop.com]

Listener is working on a few new projects. The first is called *Ozark Empire, Return to Struggleville*. It features new and alternate versions of songs featured on the eclectic *Ozark Empire* project. Be on the lookout for his latest limited edition release, titled *Talk Music*. This release features live versions of tracks he performed on his worldwide tour, *Tour of Homes*. [Myspace.com/ListenerProject]

Scribbling Idiots and Illect Recordings have come to an agreement on a recording contract. Look for their Illect debut to release after summer 2007. We've been able to hear some sneak previews and it is definitely a treat! Hit up their Myspace page for more info on the crew and to sample some of their previous work.
[Myspace.com/ScribblingIdiots / Illect.com]

RedCloud, **DJ Wise**, **Man of War**, **Kaboose** and **MotionPlus** will be performing at Cornerstone Festival this year, back to back and on the same stage. Hip-hop is usually in short supply at the festival, so be sure to head out to show your support! Want more hip-hop at Cornerstone? Be certain to request it via the Cornerstone website and at the festival if you attend. [Syntaxrecords.com]

Night Owls, a Syntax Records compilation series, has been revived! Look for volume 3 to hit stores in late March. The project features songs from many groups including: **LA Symphony**, **Pigeon John**, **Scribbling Idiots**, **Braille** and **RedCloud**.
[Syntaxrecords.com]

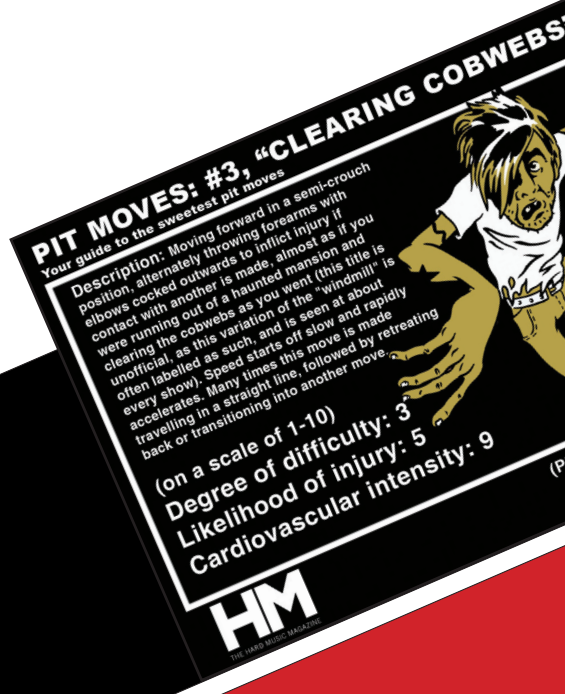
Theory Hazit recently dropped a new album, his first label release, titled *Extra Credit*. It has some fresh raps and solid production. Look for guest appearances from **Scribbling Idiots**, **Braille** and others. Check it out and support one of the hardest working artists in hip-hop.
[Myspace.com/TheoryHazit]

Update on the Sphere of Hip Hop Radio Show… By the time this issue hits your hands, the show will be on and poppin'! Remember that it is 2 hours of hip-hop that you are bound to enjoy and it airs on XM 31 The Torch. Check the website for more information and air times.
[Sphereofhiphop.com]

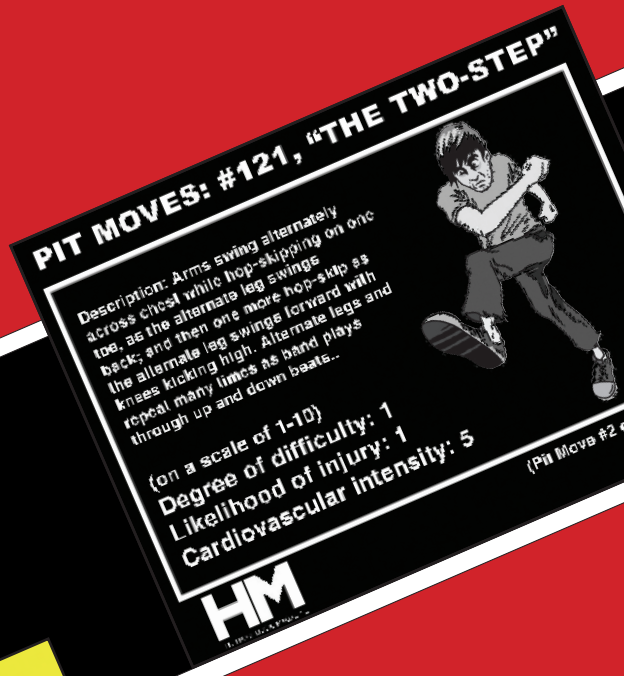
Enjoy watching music videos? Hate searching all over and across several sites to find them? Finally find one you want to watch and learn that it no longer works? Sphere of Hip Hop will be your Superman. Look for the launch of a video website this March. All hip-hop 24 hours a day.
[SphereofhiphopTV.com]

Fiending for more? Don't know where to purchase the music you read about in our column? Want to preview some of these artists? Head on over to the Sphere! Until next time… Mind That Rap!
[Sphereofhiphop.com / SphereofhiphopMP3.com / SphereofhiphopStore.com]

PIT MOVES SHIRTS


PIT MOVES: #3, "CLEARING COBWEBS"
Your guide to the sweetest pit moves
Description: Moving forward in a semi-crouch position, alternately throwing forearms with elbows cocked outwards to inflict injury if contact with another is made, almost as if you were running out of a haunted mansion and clearing the cobwebs as you went (this title is unofficial, as this variation of the "windmill" is often labelled as such, and is seen at about every show). Speed starts off slow and rapidly accelerates. Many times this move is made travelling in a straight line, followed by retreating back or transitioning into another move.
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 3
Likelihood of injury: 5
Cardiovascular intensity: 9
HM
THE HARD MUSIC MAGAZINE

PIT MOVES: #1, "THE WINDMILL"
HM
THE HARD MUSIC MAGAZINE
Description: Either almost standing still or rotating around in the pit like a "mini twister" with fully extended arms (with a clenched fist at each end) swinging in full 180-degree rotation at as high an angle as the person's shoulder blades/rotater cuffs will allow. Approaching blurring speed is a necessity and you get "bonus points" for changing direction as well as suddenly stopping and maintaining balance.
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 6
Likelihood of injury: 10
Cardiovascular intensity: 8


PIT MOVES: #121, "THE TWO-STEP"
Description: Arms swing alternately across chest while hop-skipping on one toe, as the alternate leg swings back, and then one more hop-skip as the alternate leg swings forward with knees kicking high. Alternate legs and repeat many times as band plays through up and down beats..
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 1
Likelihood of injury: 1
Cardiovascular intensity: 5
HM

Pit Move #5: Picking Up Change
Your guide to the sweetest pit moves
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 2
Likelihood of injury: 1
Cardiovascular intensity: 8
HM

AT HMMAG.COM

What **36 Crazyfists** Says

YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOR AND NOT TAKE YOURSELF TOO SERIOUSLY TO NAME YOUR BAND AFTER A JACKIE CHAN FILM, AND THAT'S WHAT WE HAVE FROM THIS BAND. FORMED IN ANCHORAGE, ALASKA IN 1994 AND TRANSPLANTED TO PORTLAND, OREGON AFTER THE DEATH OF THEIR ORIGINAL BASSIST IN 1996, THIS BAND DELIVERS POSITIVITY WITH METAL INTENSITY. VOCALIST BROCK LINDOW SAT DOWN ON THE PHONE WITH EDITOR DOUG VAN PELT TO TALK MOSHPITS, MYSPACE, JESUS, AND (GASP!) POLITICS ... AND MUCH MORE. CHECK OUT THE CONVERSATION...

I interviewed the singer for Madball (Freddy) earlier this year, and he mentioned how a lot of people talk about the "glory days of hardcore" as being way back in the past, and he differed, stating that he thought we were living in the best times for hardcore right now." I'm not pigeon-holing you as a hardcore band, per se, but what are your thoughts, one way or another, on that quote?

Um, well, I think he's right as far as it has become much more accessible and much more brought to the forefront in music. I think back in the early days of Madball, per se, there was a limited amount of people that were even aware of their music, probably. You know what I mean? And now Hatebreed, I think, basically brought it to the forefront and kind of helped it cross into the metal kids also, who weren't necessarily into just hardcore music. As far as it being, you know, much more of an aware genre, I think it's probably definitely in its heyday right now.

What are your best on-stage memories as a band – in 2006 or in your entire career?

Well, this year we got to play the mainstage at the Download Festival in England. And that was by far the most people we'd ever played to. I guess there was like 77,000 people or something. I think probably just being able to get people to clap in unison with that many people is pretty amazing. So, that was definitely a highlight of our career, for sure – being able to play for that many people.

That sounds awesome.

Yeah, it was pretty amazing. My voice was kind of blown out that day. That was the only downfall.

Without naming names, what are some of the rudest, most rock star things you've seen a fellow artist do?

Oh man! To be honest with you, with the level that our band is on and the level of bands that we've toured with, everybody's pretty cool. There's not… We haven't toured with really big rock star bands, so I can't really think of anything too crazy. Man, I wish I did have a better story for that! To be honest, I haven't really been around too many people that I thought were just a massive rock star. I just haven't been lucky enough to witness it or just haven't been lucky enough to be around those big of people. But I can't think of one thing that I thought was absolutely terrible.

What are three things an opening band should do or keep in mind?

Let's see… Three things: Number one, you should thank the headliner for letting you open. Number two, you should definitely know how long your set should be and definitely shouldn't go over 35 minutes, 40 minutes. Let's see.. What else? If you're on tour, it's always cool to... This isn't a necessity or anything, but I think it's cool when the opening band helps load out the gear at the end of the night. It's not necessary that they have to grab the headliner's gear, but it's a good gesture and it's something we always did when we were opening for bands. It's not the most important thing, but people remember things like that.

Yeah, that's a good piece of advice. What do you think of Jesus Christ?

Um, well it's a… I think he's a hero in my eyes. I think the world of him, actually. Ever since I became, uh, more in tuned with my faith, I think the discovery of how important God and Jesus is in my life has definitely made me realize how to be a better person and just have a much more inner strength by faith and things like that. It's definitely changed my life over the last few years, for sure.

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"...I think the discovery of how important God and

Cool. What do you think about His claims to be "the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by Me?"
Um, I don't really know, exactly; because I don't enjoy people basically – in any walk of life – telling you, 'This is the way it is and this is the only way it is.' So, for me personally, uh, it's been a gradual learning situation for me – learning about Jesus and what exactly He means to me in my life. So, I think that it's possible that one day I will learn more and I will think that the only way to know God is through Jesus, but I really don't know if I know enough about it right now to say, 'This is the only way you can learn about God is through Jesus,' and things like that. Just being honest, because having no religious structure growing up or very minimal and then when I turned 18 got a little bit more into it and was actually by my own choice became baptized, because I wasn't baptized as a child. I was baptized into the House Of God, and not necessarily to one religion. So, I think it's been a slow learning situation for me. And I think that I didn't really realize the two together… I think I was more confused, actually, in the beginning, that, you know, am I praying to God? Am I praying to Jesus? So, I think it's been a long learning process for me and I think maybe as I learn more I'll know how to answer that better. (laughs)

It's nice hearing honesty in response to a question like that, instead of BS.
Well, I don't want to sound absolutely dumb-founded, but I just want to be honest with the fact that I think I'm not exactly sure how I feel about that question yet. Although, learning about Jesus and what He did for me and everyone has been a wonderful learning process, but I think that initially I was more just praying to God and not really realizing the entire Jesus story.

Makes sense. I'd like to ask you about a few fixtures of the current music scene; and I'll just list one and have you comment or make any comments you want to on it.
Sure.

MTV, MTV2, and Fuse:
All together?

Yeah, just kinda music tv or tv video outlets.
Well, MTV2 and Fuse – I think it's awesome that they're playing heavier bands and having specialty shows that are showcasing the bands and the kind of music that I love and that I play. So, I love both of those channels for that. MTV is somewhat irrelevant to me these days. I mean, when I was a kid, when it first came out, I thought it was cool. You know, you were watching music videos and that was awesome. But now I rarely go on it, and whenever I am on it, it's just reality shows that I think we have way too many of anyway. And there's no real music on it, so it's… At least for the rock/metal world, I guess TRL has a little bit of hiphop and pop music. I'm definitely more a fan of MTV2 and Fuse, for sure.

Yeah, me, too. Myspace.com:
(laughs) It's so evil, but I love it. At first I heard about it for years before I ever even … or at least a year before I ever even went on it. And now, of course, I have a page. I think the greatest thing about myspace is it brings such awareness for bands. The band pages are great. You don't have to download any music. As soon as you get on it the player starts playing. It's definitely cool for bands, for sure. And it's a cool way to talk with people, I guess, also. I talk to people every day on there from all over the world. So, it's pretty cool.

Radio stations:
Um, well. It's cool. Radio, I think, is not really catering… At least not commercial radio – isn't really catering to the music that I like, but, you know, sometimes specialty shows you get on the big rock stations and that's cool. I don't really listen to the radio much, so I don't know. I'm glad we have it, I guess, if you wanna listen to it.

Rock magazines:
Well, it's probably what I spend a good portion of my last few years doing – is sitting on the tour bus and reading magazines about bands that I love, so it's a big part of my life. Yeah, I definitely like rock magazines.

Guitar Center and other such Large chain music stores:
Um, yeah, they're great! Guitar Center seems to cater to the bands pretty good – especially on tour, you know. If you need something and you're in the right town, you can basically get whatever you need there. So, it's good. It's always good to cater to the mom and pop stores also, but usually they have a limited supply of stuff you might need, so it's good to have the big places that can cater to all your needs.

Right on. Is there any other part of fixture of the music scene that I've left out?
Um, not really. I'm just very grateful for the opportunity to be able to play music and have CDs in stores and be able to

Jesus is in my life has definitely made me realize how to be a better person and just have a much more inner strength by faith."

see the world with my friends. We're very grateful for that.

Could you describe Alaska or parts of Alaska for those of us who've never been there or don't know much about the state?
Yeah, that's what I spend most of my day doing. (laughs) It's the greatest place in the world in my eyes. I've been all over the world and it's got such a sense of cleanliness there and the air is extremely nice and cold and crisp and clean. The scenery overall is the most epic thing about the place. Just the mountains. There's little cities placed in the middle of mountains all over the place. It's a wonderful place. Very friendly people and a very long running history of culture – from the Eskimoes to everyone who their livelihoods are spent by commercial fishing and things like that, which was a big part of my life growing up with my family. But it's just a wonderful place. It's very cold in the winter. Fairly dark, but the summer's, you know, it's 24-hour sunlight, so that's pretty amazing, also.

If you look at some of the classic artists in history that have kind of fused their faith, like Michaelangelo in the Sistine Chapel and you compare and contrast that to a band that's considered a Christian rock band, like Underoath or P.O.D. or something, what differences or similarities do you see in those two?
Wow. That's a heckuva question. Well, the similarities… Maybe the similarities are that they… Neither of them re-invented the wheel, as far as their art. I mean, people were drawing and things like that, and people have been playing music for years, but I think that both of them – Underoath being a small band in the beginning and then having such a breakthrough on their last record and being a Christian band and so many kids that weren't even aware of Christian music probably got turned on to Underoath through maybe just bands that are liking… And I'm not saying Underoath is like Taking Back Sunday, but I'm just saying, like, those type of kids all of a sudden heard Underoath. The similarity may be to the fact that he was… Michaelangelo being, maybe, just a hermit or a recluse type of guy and having such a massive impact on art. I think that maybe the similarities of those bands, just because they are now much more brought into the forefront of people's awareness of their music. I think Christian metal and rock bands, period, have gotten way bigger the last few years, with, like, Demon Hunter, Norma Jean and all kinds of those bands – that I think maybe a few years back wouldn't have been as heard of and maybe not as accepted in the mainstream. Even in the festivals… As I Lay Dying was on Ozzfest. I think it's a great time for Christian rock and metal bands.

What are some of the coolest pit moves or audience participation things you've seen?
Ha ha. I'm old school. I always loved the circle pit and I still do. I grew up with Slayer and Metallica. Those were my metal bands growing up. I think the "Wall of Death" is extremely dangerous and it's not something that my band has ever done per se – not that we really have the type of music that we could really do a great "Wall of Death" – but I think it's pretty dangerous and I'm not really a big fan of that one. Let's see… What's cool? (laughs) It's always cool to see people having an expression and an outlet somehow through music. I just think that one's a little wild. I'm pretty sure a couple people have died in it.

Really?
I know at a Shadowsfall show in Florida, I think someone died during the "Wall of Death," so yeah, it's not one that you should probably keep doing. You know, the circle pit. I'm going to go with it, because I'm in my thirties now, so I always loved the circle pit. It's a safe one.

I've seen some people do what's probably the "Wall of Death." They called it "the Brave Heart" thing, where you've got people on two sides and someone says, "Go," and they…
Exactly!

Okay, yeah.
That's exactly it. It's exactly like *Brave Heart.*

Yeah, that is pretty insane. Well, what are some of the lyrics on Rest Inside The Flames that really stand out to you – that you're really, really glad you wrote?
Let's see… I think that every song has its own life to it, and I enjoyed writing all the songs, but I think that the majority and overall theme of the record is to still try and enjoy your life in and of the heavy times that we're living in right now. I guess I kinda touched on lots of things. I got married this summer, so a lot of it has to do with how glad I am to be in love with my wife. As cheesy as that may sound, I definitely write about love and just the struggle in life and trying to stay excited and be adventurous and still seek out the good things in life. I think that's been the path that I've been on the past four or five years. So, I think that's the overall theme of my lyrical content. I can't really pick out one thing that I'm, like, extremely proud of. It's just exactly… I think when I wrote it, it's exactly how I'm trying to conduct day to day life, really.

Cool. What are some of your biggest fears when you look at politics or the world situation in general?
I think my biggest fear probably is a certain weapon getting into the wrong hands, you know? It seems like, to the most part, the people that are against us – or Americans or the Western culture – they don't have the same type of… At least from my limited knowledge on them, they don't have the lust for life that I do. It seems like they're dying for a different cause. That's pretty scary, you know, people that don't really value life like I do or maybe you do that can just walk into a mall and blow up a whole shopping mall. That's scary. I hope it never happens, but it seems like it could happen easily. So, I guess those are the things that I'm scared of. I just think that it's good for us to really start to rekindle the way we're perceived throughout the world. I spend a good portion of my years in Europe on tour and I talk to people all the time and they have a varied sense…

(interrupted by an airlines employee)

...Anyway, I think in the last election I voted against Bush – not to go into my reasons on it – but my main reason was to give somebody else a chance to fix the mess that we are in. That's the one thing that I'm hopeful at the end of this year when we do have an election, that we have someone with different ideas and hopefully better ideas and can surround him with a team that can help rekindle the way that things are. That's me being optimistic. That's what I hope for.

Is there any subject or topic that you wanted to address in this interview that I didn't cover or any question you've always wanted to be asked?
Hmmm. Not really. I think that I've already been asked some cool questions, and always talking about Alaska is a highlight for me, because I love the place and I'm always trying to bring awareness to the state, because I think it's a wonderful place. Other than that, I can't really think of anything.

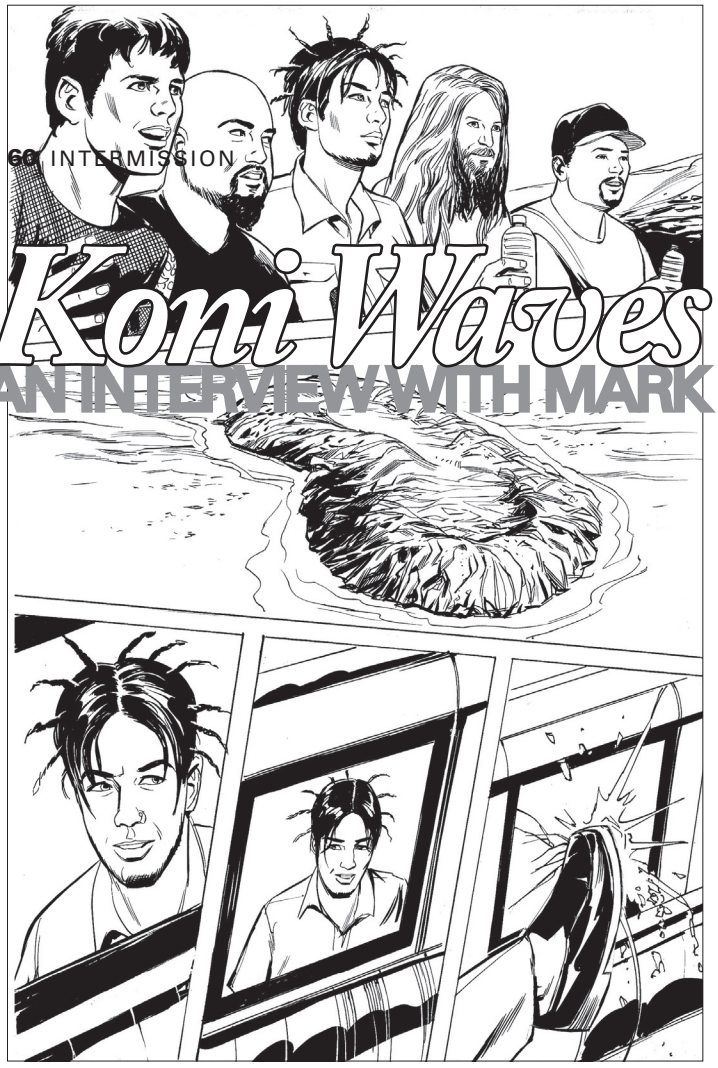
If there's anything I can do for you, please let me know.
Alright, Doug. I appreciate it. When can I read this?

This will go in our March/April issue, so probably late February or early March.
Awesome. Alright, Doug, you have a good Christmas and you take care.

✖

Koni Waves

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK POULTON



Mark Poulton and his company are doing what a lot of us desire: taking our skills, talent, faith and dreams and taking them out to the "real world." His world happens to be graphic novels and comic books. And his latest project, Koni Waves, incorporates music into the story.

Tell me about this comic project you are working on? (describe story, artwork, publishing deal, distribution, etc)

The name of my comic book is *Koni Waves*. It's about Koni Kanawai, a female detective in Honolulu, Hawaii who specializes in supernatural cases. The character was created by me and my two friends, Stephen Sistilli and Dexter Weeks back in 2001. I write the stories, while Steve handles the artwork and Dex does the lettering. The first 3-issue mini-series was released in 2006 from Arcana Studio and distributed by Diamond Distribution throughout the world. Arcana is Canada's biggest comic publisher. The comic has been featured in episodes of *Psych* on the USA Network, as well as the *OC* on FOX. We were thrilled when Arcana gave us the go ahead to do a follow-up series. That's where we are currently at. We have just begun work on our second mini-series, entitled *Koni Waves: Ghouls Gone Wild!* While the original mini-series was done in black and white as homage to the old horror comic books of the '70s, the new series will be in full color. The first issue will feature a guest appearance from the band, Adema. I'm thrilled to have Adema on board for this issue. They are my favorite band and I find their music to be a big inspiration in my work. In the story, "The Island of Ghosts," Adema comes to the small island of Lanai to film their latest video. There are rumors of the island being haunted and soon the band's music video shoot is overrun with ghosts. Luckily for them, Koni Waves is on board as security.

How do the challenges these characters face relate to real life?

Koni Waves is a fun, supernatural detective story that delves into Hawaiian myths. Imagine *Nancy Drew* mixed with the zany horror aspects of *Scooby Doo* and that's *Koni Waves*. Although for the most part, the comic is very tongue-in-cheek, we do deal with some serious aspects. For example, Koni deals with the consequences of her excessive drinking; losing her job, damaging her credibility and relationships.

What led to this project?

I had been working on some ideas for the second volume of stories and learned of the Night Marchers. It's a Hawaiian myth about an army of ghosts that walk the island of Lanai. Adema didn't come into the picture until I received a message from Kris Kohls, the band's drummer, on Myspace. Kris commented on some of the Koni artwork I had on my page and wished me luck with the book. It's not often one of your favorite rock stars contacts you, so I definitely tried to make the most of it. I asked Kris if the band would be interested in appearing in an issue. Kris said they would be honored and that's kind of how the story for "The Island of Ghosts" was born. Believe me, I feel really blessed to have all this good fortune happen to me. It's not often you hear about stuff like this happening.

What are your goals for it? How does it feel to be on this side of the project (prior to release, etc)?

It feels great to be on this side of the table. I've been a comic fan for over twenty years. I'm just happy for the chance to release a comic book. All of the extra stuff that has come from it, the interest from Hollywood, is an added bonus. I do have high hopes for the issue with Adema, though. I'm hoping having them onboard brings in some new readers who wouldn't necessarily buy a comic book. And I'm hoping we're able to get them some good publicity. They have a new CD coming out around the same time, so hopefully things will work out well for both of us.

How do you feel about the fusion of your faith and your art, your craft?

As you can probably tell, Koni Waves isn't a Christian comic book. It's a mixture of horror and mystery. However, I am a Christian and I think my writing has really benefited from my faith. Since

being a Christian, I have noticed my thoughts are a lot clearer and I don't stress over things as much anymore.

What are the unique challenges, if any, that a believer might face in this field of work?
I haven't had many with my comic book. However, should I do a Christian comic somewhere down the line, I'm sure it will be harder to find a mainstream publisher for it. I think some people are just put off by the term Christian when it comes to their entertainment, thinking it's going to be "preachy." That shouldn't be the case, though, as there are many great comic books out there dealing with Christianity that come off as more entertainment than education – not that there is not a message. The creators seem to pull it off in a way that is more subtle.

If you could make some widespread changes in the graphic novel field, what changes would you make? Why?
I think right now some of the best storytelling is going on in the comic book field. You can definitely tell Hollywood is taking interest. Every summer the theaters are dominated by comic book movies, but the audience is missing out on the source material that these movies are based on. I'm sure most people aren't even aware there are comic books being made anymore. I'm sure they think Spider-Man and Batman only live in Saturday morning cartoons. Growing up, I remember seeing the new GI Joe toy commercials. They would plug the new toys and then plug the latest issue of the GI Joe comic. Needless to say, my very first comic was GI Joe. I can't see why at the end of a trailer for *Spider-Man* or *Batman* they couldn't do the same thing. I think the companies and creators need to try to bring in more new readers. While the market for comics is stronger than it has been in recent years, I think there could be so much more improvement. Maybe it's that marketing degree finally going to good use, but that's one of the things I'm trying to accomplish with having Adema in an issue. Maybe we can turn some music fans into comic book fans.

What are a few basic necessities for any graphic novel / comic book?
Since it's a visual medium, the artwork has to be good. I think it's the artwork that will first grab a reader's attention. However, if there is no story to back it up, you will lose that reader. A great comic book needs a good blend of both.

Anything else you'd like to address?
Besides *Koni Waves: Ghouls Gone Wild!*, there is a collection of the original mini-series called *Koni Waves: First Wave* available in June. Plus, you can check out all the latest news on the series at koniwaves.com. Thanks for having me!

✖

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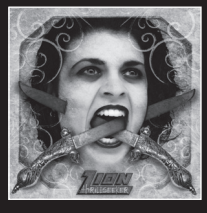

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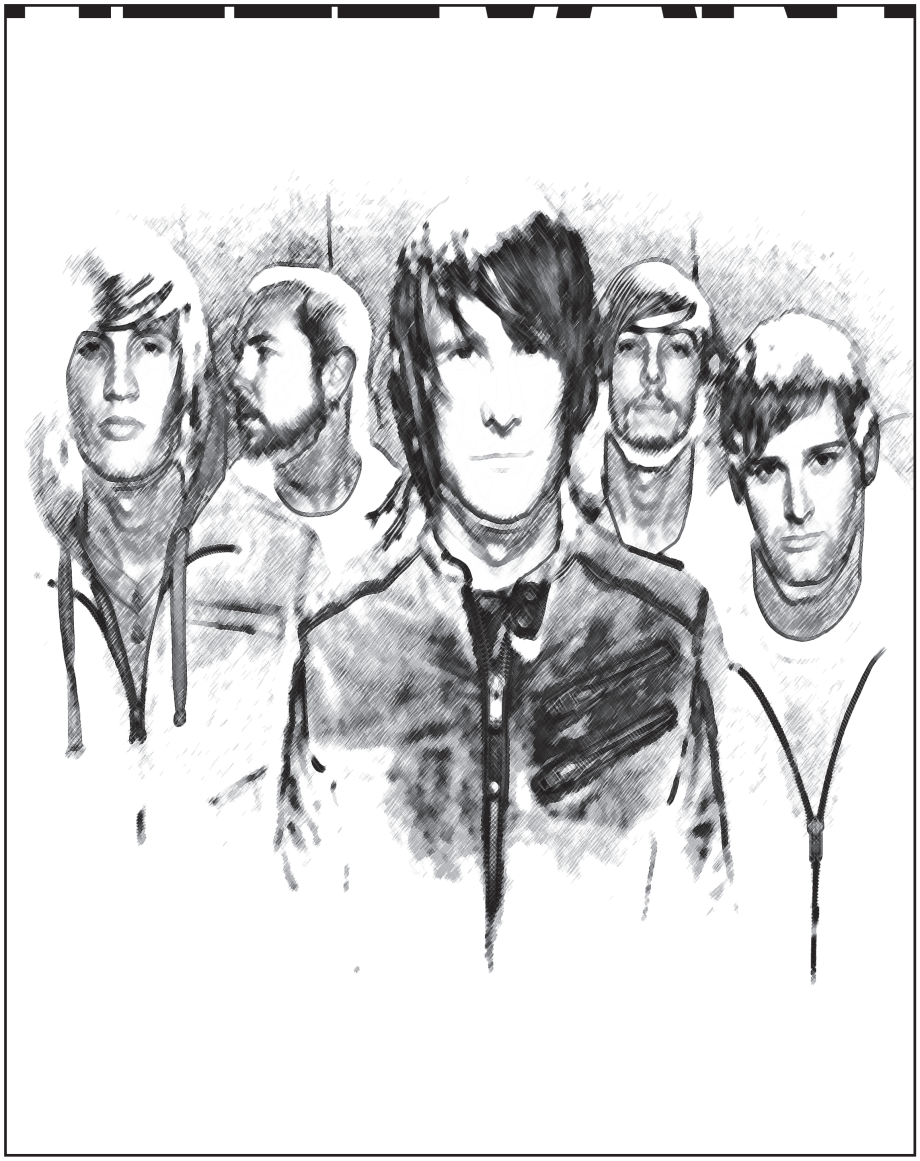


ANBERLIN

CITIES

The guys in Anberlin set a high benchmark with their previous, sophomore effort, Never Take Friendship Personal. As a rule, this band is one of the most unique of their class, primarily because of the voice of frontman Stephen Christian, as well as songs like "Paper Thin Hymn" and "A Day Late" (both from said sophomore release). Overall on Cities, they touch on the brilliance of NTFP with another album of unique melodies, songwriting, and guitar work, though the impact may not be as immediate.

I think growth is the virtue Anberlin was searching for this time around, which was ultimately a wise evolution on their part. "The Unwinding Cable Car" is a ballad that excels in prompting vibrant, heavenly emotions amidst apparent grief, though it's not a "rocker" in the least. "A Whisper and a Clamor" is both catchy and cathartic, which promises airwave appeal. And this is, decidedly, their most "vertical" work lyrically to date, characterized by encouraging words for any pop/rock/emo kid who is down and out. For example, on "Alexithymia" Christian muses: "There's more to living than being alive." In the end, this is the type of record that may take several listens to break you, but when it does, it's impact should be felt more deeply than anything they have done before.

Persistent individual performance is Anberlin's mantra. Christian's voice itself is somewhere between Morrissey, The Outfield, and Tears for Fears. This places him in a category somewhat his own, and combined with an unorthodox rhythmic quality/delivery, he has that rare blend of quirk and familiarity that equals compelling. Guitarist Joe Milligan expands successfully on his own past efforts in songwriting and musicianship, with some very interesting sounds and riffery throughout.

➡

Rating system

05 *CLASSIC*
04 *FABULOUS*
03 *SOLID*
02 *SUSPECT*
01 *AMISS*
***** *1/2*

Anberlin defies classification to a point, thanks to strong 80's input which catapults them far enough from the emo yawnings of others. There are tangible moments of acceleration (as well as braking) on *Cities*, but rather than swerve, it gently carries you to destinations unfamiliar, though you may not initially notice you are off the beaten path. [TOOTH & NAIL] ANDREW SCHWAB

STARS ARE FALLING

THE CONSEQUENCE OF REVENGE

I recall hearing a lot about this band back when they released a split with Skylines. That was back in 2005, which now seems like a while ago. After all that buzz, I wondered what happened to Stars Are Falling. Who would of guessed they were off doing what all bands do: recording a full length record. Sonically speaking, Stars Are Fallings's debut on Blood and Ink sounds most to me like a combination of styles similar to that of Comeback Kid and August Burns Red, who just so happen to be two of my favorite bands. I guess one could say it is hardcore metal, but that is a description that is getting vague nowadays. What really captured me on this album were the gang vocals, which are extremely well executed and timed. The first track starts off with ferocious gang vocals, after which lead vocalist Robert Bloomfield's voice erupts onto the recording. At first Bloomfield's deep screaming vocals seemed out of place, but upon further listening emerged as the missing piece to complete the group's style. The last song, "A New Beginning," is also my favorite song on the CD and ends the record just as it begun: with blistering gang vocals. In between the beginning and end, the pummeling guitars never let up. It is chugga-chugga-chug the whole way through. [BLOOD & INK] RAND RENFROW

ROSIE THOMAS

THESE FRIENDS OF MINE

As special as Victoria Williams, this tiny singer/songwriter seems to sound as she's having as much fun making this album as we do listening to it. This album was a simply spun affair that was recorded over the course of two years in Sufjan Stevens' Brooklyn apartment with Denison Witmer lending a hand, too. Warm, inviting, and CSN&Y moments of light harmonious vocals float between the speakers. "Why Waste More Time" starts off with laughter and chatter recorded amongst friends that it's almost too cute and threatens never to start; but like all of these tunes, the stories and songs convey earnestness to such a degree that soon you're lost in her songs. While her three previous Sub Pop releases might have endeared her to us chiefly for that vulnerable/fragile quality of her child-like voice, tunes like the lead-off, "Title," show so much muscle that her strengths rather than her frailty stand the tallest. It's not that she's rocking out, per se, but a quiet confidence is exuded here. It doesn't hurt that three of the songs are covers of great tunes, like "One I Love" and "Songbird," which she adds her own twist to elegantly. "Paper Doll" is a cover of her friend Denison Witmer, who also coincidently covered "Songbird" on his *Recovered* album. "Much Farther To Go" recalls wonderful "love memories" and fantasizes about going back in time to revisit a night when her mother cried, so she could sing a song to back to her that she'd sung for her, "something about the cross and what Jesus did for her..." In "Kite Song," she sings ever gently: "Oh, tie me to the end of a kite, so I can go – go on with my life ... I just want to go away from here." It's one of the most emotive songs ever. While frustration with her own career's direction may have been the creative instigation behind these relaxed-and-let-the-songs-flow-amongst-friends sessions, the outcome is quite capable of catapulting her notoriety ever higher. It's that good. It'll be one of those albums that'll have people asking you, "Who's that?" and then they, too, will fall in love with this musical treasure. [NETTWERK] DOUG VAN PELT

JONEZETTA

POPULARITY

Jonezetta is that guy. You know the one that waits well past the party's start time, until festivities are well underway just so he can make an entrance grand enough for everyone to take notice and steal the attention. Synth-pop has begun to creep onto radio stations for awhile now, dance rock is already a burgeoning genre and rock and roll has been slowly learning to have fun again. But here comes Jonezetta with all of these elements, and they do them so well that everyone else will end up stopping to take notice of just how well they do it. The title track, "Popularity," and lead single, "Get Ready (Hot Machete)," illustrate just how much fun Jonezetta intends to have. Guitars punctuate all the right notes while Robert Chisolm lyrically struts across the stage in your mind. Keyboards and bass form a layered synergy that carries the songs from one to the next. And Chisolm showcases a standout vocal that remains both stated and stately among all the noise. Amidst the raucous energy and soaring hooks, Chisolm sings poignantly on topics that matter, whether critiquing popular culture or longing for something greater. It's a mix that steps boldly through the door declaring itself both beautiful and meaningful. Jonezetta has arrived and we are glad they finally made their entrance. [TOOTH & NAIL] MATT CONNER

FUTURE OF FORESTRY

TWILIGHT

Ken Andrews may have manufactured one of the best discs to come out of the modern melodic rock scene in years. In 2005, he was the producer, engineer and mixing professional on Mae's, *The Everglow*. The overall sound of the record was breathtaking and the songs sparkle with an unending sheen. San Diego's Future of Forestry certainly knew the wisdom of a music production genius such as Andrews. The quartet's Credential Recordings' debut, *Twilight*, is adorned with layers of sound, beautifully textured guitars, great bass playing that fills the low-end perfectly, and a drummer that dishes out shovelfuls of hard-driving intensity. "Open Wide," the opening track, does what its title commands and kicks open the front door to the 12-song set with a Bloc Party-styled energy attack. "All I Want" is next in line and wanders through some esoteric sounds to arrive at a slamming chorus that hammers home a solid rock radio melody. The title track makes excellent use of electric piano tones, bassist Luke Floeter's tasty bass chords, dreamy guitar work, ELO-ish backing vocals, and an excellent vocal performance from Eric Owyoung. "If You Find Her" is a departure from the rest of the record and is one of the best ballads to arrive onto disc in a long time. When Owyoung sings: "From this blessed morning, a love constant has been pouring." In the tune, "Gazing," one can see where he is coming from. With an album this engaging, powerful and uplifting, there is indeed a Love Constant behind it. [CREDENTIAL] CHRIS CALLAWAY

Ratings

	DV	Writer
Anberlin *Cities*	04	03
Stars Are Falling *The Consequence Of Revenge*	04	03*
Rosie Thomas *These Friends Of Mine*	04*	
Jonezetta *Popularity*	03*	04
Future of Forestry *Twilight*	03*	04
Inhale Exhale *The Lost, The Sick, The Sacred*	04	03*
Pivitplex *The King In A Rookery*	03*	02
Tyrone Wells *Hold On*	04	
Between The Trees *The Story And The Song*	04	04
Life In Your Way *Waking Giants*	03	03
Cool Hand Luke *The Balancing Act*	04	03
Lovedrug *Everything Starts Where It Ends*	04	04

INHALE EXHALE

THE LOST, THE SICK, THE SACRED

There's something special happening on Inhale Exhale's first Solid State release, *The Lost, The Sick, The Sacred*. This Ohio-native quartet – featuring former Relient K bass player Brian Pittman and have been hitting stages around the country with August Burns Red, The Chariot, and Destroy the Runner – have put together an impressive record with coherent technical skill and a cohesive lyrical front, demanding the attention of fans and garnering the kind of reputation and credibility needed for longevity. The opening track, "Redemption," comes out swinging and sets the stage for the rest of the record. An eerie, quick build puts the listener in the right mindset before Inhale Exhale punishes their opening two riffs, hitting like a one-two punch. The band then pulls back and drops some melody on a chorus, kicks out in a breakdown, and continues through to complete a well-written songscape. The next track, "By Grace," is similar by comparison: It kicks off hard, pulls back to some melodic hooks, and gets back to the grind right when needed. It's this kind of thing Inhale Exhale really wants to be known for; it's not random, well-written breakdowns, but the overall, total quality of songwriting. In today's oversaturated metalcore market, a lot of bands will merely string riff after riff or breakdown after breakdown back-to-back with no regard for the actual craft of songwriting. Inhale Exhale succeeds in their goal: They have taken the time to make sure their sound, as well as their lyrical content, was consistent and organized. Throughout "Tonight We Die Together," the melodic choruses give way to well-done transitions to breakdowns in separate time signatures to a sprawling, airy bridge before redeeming itself in melody again. It feels like a unit – not like four breakdowns written at four separate times and then put back to back with little to no regard for transition. Inhale Exhale is on its way to securing a spot in listeners' CD players. *The Lost, The Sick, The Sacred* may not be as thrash or as metal as some of the band's peer records, but the quality of the songs, the melodic drifts, as well as technical skill make it a record worth listening to. ~~[SOLID STATE] DAVID STAGG~~

PIVITPLEX

THE KING IN A ROOKERY

Industry has been getting a lot of talk in HM these days and there's not a better example of a Christian band with a capitol C than Pivitplex. Never mind the fact that I can't pronounce or remember how to spell their name; on *The King in a Rookery*, Pivitplex have composed a smooth album of safe songs complete with smart production, a companion devotional and safe inspiring lyrics: "We're a part of a generation of massive dreams / with half-brained schemes of love / there are people who stand in line to freeze our minds and say it's not our time" ("One Goodbye"). At their best, Pivitplex are catchy and nostalgic, but overall they just sound like everything playing during any youth group, 10 years ago, without the memories or big hooks. If you're missing All Star United, I recommend checking out *The King In A Rookery*, or better yet just go listen to ASU, as they just reformed. ~~[HAWLEY] NATE ALLEN~~

TYRONE WELLS

HOLD ON

Oh my! Did someone tell Tyrone that he should disband the late 90s band Skypark and set about to find his Lenny Kravitz soul? I guess it's true, because these 13 songs swing and drip with honest-to-goodness groove. With mostly a stripped-down, organic musical bed, he takes his voice where none of us knew it could go, back when we were listening to him croon on about a sweet "Little Starbucks Girl." He wastes no time showing his inspiration, as the first cut, "What Are We Fighting For," incorporates a nice little backup choir to punch up the feel-good gospel chorus, where they sing: "I have a dream / one day we'll see / all men be free / I still believe." It's enough to send shivers down your spine, if you're not already singing along. When he cries, "I need you, need you baby ... I'm dying inside and I cannot hide my need..." ("Need") this doesn't sound like a suburban yuppie pouting over a departed girlfriend. He makes it sound like his bones will shatter if he doesn't have this woman back. When he tells a story ("She's Leaving") – accompanied by slapping bass and the biggest fuzz rock guitar you've heard since you put those Prince and Stevie Wonder albums back on the shelf – you tend to believe he means what he's singing. Without missing a beat, the next track, "Dream Like New York," melts all that soft gooey part of the brain matter ... like butter. If this album doesn't get played everywhere in this new year, another monumental crime will have been committed. *Hold On* is about as hot as the marriage between R&B and Rock can get. ~~[UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC] DOUG VAN PELT~~

BETWEEN THE TREES

THE STORY AND THE SONG

This is the precursor to the great album. At least, if Between The Trees continues on the sonic trajectory they're currently traveling. It's not that *The Story And The Song* is a bad effort. On the contrary, it's quite good. But it's frustratingly good with each track revealing hints of alt-rock greatness. But this is to be expected. After all, Between The Trees is comprised of mostly teenagers crafting their debut album. It's a given that the disc should be a bit rough around the edges with permission for the band members to find their collective selves along the way. But tracks like "White Lines and Red Lights" make the listener forget this is no veteran act. With its piano-driven balladry in direct contrast with a frenetic snare, it succeeds brilliantly in then letting the floor drop out from under allowing vocalist Ryan Kirkland to take center stage. The band is highly involved with To Write Love On Her Arms – a non-profit organization working with youth and issues of self-mutilation and suicide – and this shows with two songs focused on that very topic. Both "A Time For Yohe" and "The Way She Feels" are honest and direct in their approach, fitting for such a topic. Kirkland delivers particularly well on these tracks. The emotional and musical intensity here is fantastic for such a radio-friendly rock sound. Maturity and experience are the only ingredients keeping Between The Trees on the ground at this point. ~~[BONDED] MATT CONNER~~

LIFE IN YOUR WAY

WAKING GIANTS

With bands coming and going as quickly as they do in the age of project studios and MP3s, it's becoming more and more uncommon to find originality. An annoying amount of bands think "original" means offensive, strange or needlessly technical. It seems nobody got the "try to write half decent songs" memo, but Life In Your Way apparently did. With 11 tracks containing plenty of vocal and soundscape variety, as well as some great vocal work, it seems that they tried to actually throw some good music on the CD, though some of their songs become slightly repetitive with a little too consistent tempo and feel. Beyond that, I liked the lighter stuff with singing better than their hardcore stuff. Seeing that these guys have good voices, I would have loved more lighter stuff on the album… Either way, *Waking Giants* is one worth listening to and definitely one worth picking up. ~~[SOLID STATE] LYNDON UNGER~~

COOL HAND LUKE

THE BALANCING ACT

If you're anything like me, you dig learning about the history of the bands you listen to, discovering new bands, and hearing new music from the bands you like. *The Balancing Act* should satisfy all three camps – fans of Cool Hand Luke who are unacquainted with the early work of the band, those who are interested in a crash course in the ways of CHL, and diehards that itch to hear the rock trio's latest songs. *Balancing* features three tracks from CHL's independent projects, one cut from the band's seven inch, seven songs from the group's Floodgate albums, plus three brand new tracks. It's interesting to experience the evolution of CHL's early screamo-flavored vocals to Mark Nicks' most recent piano-based rock pieces. If the new tracks accurately represent CHL's forthcoming work, those in the "unfamiliar camp" may very well migrate to the "fan camp." ~~[FLOODGATE] ELIZABETH HALL~~

LOVEDRUG

EVERYTHING STARTS WHERE IT ENDS

Lovedrug's sophomore release showcases a band clearly marking its own territory while living amidst the mainstream cultural influences, becoming all things to all genres while Michael Shepherd's vocals keep concepts tightly bound. The result? Pure sonic bliss. ~~[THE MILITIA GROUP] MATT CONNER~~

UNTIL JUNE

S/T

"We just want people to feel what we feel," explains vocalist Josh Ballard and the quote couldn't be more dead-on. Armed with piano-driven melodies ala Keane, Ballard leads a trio focused on crafting emotional pop rock that succeeds in its goal to emanate feelings from coast to coast. This album has been a long time coming. Years after relocating from Phoenix to Los Angeles to pursue their musical dream, the band eventually signed to Flicker Records. But after an EP release, their full-length was pushed back numerous times for a number of business reasons. Ultimately, the disc is worth the wait. "You Do" is straight out of Ben Gibbard's head with its forlorn approach overtop balladry that evokes sunny sadness. Lead single "Sleepless" is more catchy, with Ballard's falsetto cry and emo/punk riffs, while "What I've Done" is the most radio-friendly with its straightforward musical arrangement. While fans have had to be patient, Until June's full-length debut is worth the wait. The primary emotion to be felt here is happiness that you discovered a great record. ~~[FLICKER] MATT CONNER~~

THIS BEAUTIFUL REPUBLIC

S/T

Upon first listen, This Beautiful Republic seems to sing all the right words. But little of its music and lyrics stick with you after all is sung and done. Grand intentions are hinted at, which produce negligible results. They're talking a lot, but not saying much. Song titles like "Jesus to the World" grab your attention, but This Beautiful Republic never presents Christ in a particularly creative way and attention deficit disorder quickly sets in. To its credit, this work features a few appealing elements. Opener, "Casting Off," kicks off the disc with a memorable, Franz Ferdinand-like jittery guitar riff, and one track in particular, "New Year," has moving altar call written all over it. Sonically, the band occasionally gets scream-y, as with "Going Under." But this Ohio act is most at home when behaving straight forwardly melodic, exemplified by the encouraging "Right Now," where they sing: "He's telling the truth / You will make it through." Speaking of telling the truth, in truth there is nothing distinctive about This Beautiful Republic's first effort. With the explosion of new bands in today's music scene, propelled by the internet's immediacy, each fresh act is vying for our attention like starving children on a late night charitable infomercial. Sadly, this minor effort doesn't say "choose me" loudly and convincingly enough. ~~[FOREFRONT] DAN MACINTOSH~~

RELIENT K

FIVE SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO

Relient K have proven that they can write accessible, commercial, 3-minute pop/punk songs from here to the moon and back, complete with upbeat attitudes, which will make the most sullen youngsters forget their homework woes and their pre-teen frustrations. On *Five Score and Seven Years Ago*, the band makes no exception to their previous precedent, which has brought them boundless successes in markets on both sides of the musical/spiritual chasm. There has been growth since their past efforts here, however, and it is in the area of breadth. There is a mature emotional quality to this newest release that occurs often enough to imply intention. Think RK with an early Jimmy Eat World or Death Cab twist, resulting in something that is more reminiscent to the Mae's and Angels and Airwaves of the world than just the Blink 182's or Sum 41's. For instance, check out the first single, "Must Have Done Something Right." Piano, with soft-spoken vox, give way to a primarily acoustic-driven rock (not punk) song. Keyboards and other instrumentation are present enough throughout the album to take the primary focus off rock guitar enough to render a new, fragile balance. But don't let the word "maturity" scare you. If your teachers or your parents have you down, just put this record on and you will remember (that) you have your whole life ahead of you to frown. ~~[GOTEE] ANDREW SCHWAB~~

BOSQUE BROWN

CERRO VERDE

This petite voice lives in that alt-country-fied range above shaking and slightly underneath and sideways of true Texas blues. This earthen vessel treasure has laid down four very special songs on this all-too-short EP, *Cerro Verde*. Armed with just a guitar and this voice, this small town Texas gal (Mara Lee Miller) is captivating as she tells her stories of truth, grit and woe. She has that "stop you dead in your tracks and believe what she's saying" quality. A fella could fall in love with this gal's voice, as did Damien Jurado, who can take credit for "discovering" this gem. A couple years later her debut full-length, *Bosque Brown Plays Mara Lee Miller*, was released (2005). Here's hoping this 4-song EP is just a hint of more loveliness to come. The real collector must have the one-side vinyl release of *Cerro Verde*, which features an etching on the flipside. ~~[BURNT TOAST VINYL] KERN COUNTY KID, THE~~

END OF DESTINY

THE THOUGHTLESS EXISTENCE

End Of Destiny erupts raw metalcore encompassed by their young ambition and fresh energy. By incorporating eerie keyboard undertones, solo spoken words, and lengthy intro/outro guitar work; this St. Louis based quintet proves they've done their hardcore homework in order to fight the ever so popular scene stagnation. Unfortunately a few of the chord progressions feel sloppy, the lyrics are forced, and sometimes the breakdowns hit premature – but this will all improve as long as their hearts always stay strong and true. Between vocalist Dan Terry's roaring vocals and his bandmates' escalating intensity is a fresh first tattoo and the collective sweat from a poorly lit basement show. And that's all they need. ~~[OPEN GRAVE] DAN FRAZIER~~

VARIOUS ARTISTS

I BELONG TO THIS BAND

Flummoxed as to why a musical form as old as Sacred Harp singing belongs in a magazine dedicated to music of godly, hard and heavy natures? Those three aforementioned descriptives just answered why. Massive group singing from hymnals such as *The Sacred Harp* is not only one of the oldest forms of American music, but as a capella goes, this can be some sonically overpowering stuff. Such is proven by *I Belong To This Band*, a companion to the recent Sacred Harp documentary, *Awake My Soul*. Collecting numbers recorded as far back as 1922 and as recently as a singing convention in 2006, the cumulative effect evokes a gale force gust of Holy Spirit wind in the ears. Novelties such as a multi-tracking tape manipulator singing four-part harmony in Sacred Harp tradition pack a wallop, too. Listen closely and you'll hear parallels to Native American pow wow vocalizing and Gregorian chant. But be assured it's now only solidly Protestant, but aesthetically potent as music unto the Almighty ought to be. ~~[DUST TO DIGITAL] JAMIE LEE RAKE~~

Ratings

	DV	Writer
Until June *S/T*	03*	04
This Beautiful Republic *S/T*	03*	03
Relient K *Five Score And Seven Years Ago*	04	03
Bosque Brown *Cerro Verde*	04	04*
End Of Destiny *The Thoughtless Existence*	03	02*
Various Artists *I Belong To This Band*	02	05
Emery *The Question [Deluxe Edition]*	04	04
Randy Stonehill/Phil Keaggy *Together Live!*		03*
All Saved Freak Band *Harps On Willows*	02	03*
Beneath The Sky *What Demons Do To Saints*	03	
Apologetix *Wordplay*	02*	04
P.O.D. *Greatest Hits [The Atlantic Years]*	04	
Lost Ocean *S/T*	03	04*

EMERY
THE QUESTION [DELUXE EDITION]

Terms like "deluxe edition" smack of bilking captive consumers. After all, why stick with the initial CD when you can have the 'new and improved' special release, instead? Emery's repackaged *The Question* is an exception to this marketing gimmick, however. Naturally, the disc's original twelve tracks are worthwhile all on their own – few other bands have mastered the combination of screamo and melodic rock quite so well. But this jewel-boxed extra DVD is a surprising treat in the way it thoroughly tells the Emery story, which is nothing short of miraculous. How these Southern boys traveled on blind faith to Seattle and then somehow became one of the most respected new bands on the scene is both heartwarming and inspirational. Far too often, music groups waste valuable DVD time on road tomfoolery and backstage patter. But this disc's band interviews will transform you from an Emery novice to nearly an expert, in only a short period of viewing time. It is that informative. Additionally, the lengthened CD is bonus-fied with five, mainly piano-backed, acoustic tracks, which particularly bring out lead singer Toby Morrell's vocal sweetness. These de-volume-d takes also reveal strong songs; proving how Emery is about more than just powerful rock & roll bluster. There are also two demos tacked on. Emery deserves this deluxe edition because these talented musicians earned it. *The Question [Deluxe Edition]* is an excellent introduction for newbies and a lovingly widened viewpoint for established fans. In each case, this question is the answer. [TOOTH & NAIL] DAN MACINTOSH

RANDY STONEHILL/PHIL KEAGGY
TOGETHER LIVE!

Stonehill and Keaggy are Christian music vets, as well as old friends. More significantly, however, audio recordings do not always do these highly watch-able artists justice, which makes this new live DVD so worthwhile. Keaggy is consistently awe-inspiring in concert. He drums on the body of his guitar, multi-tracks his playing and singing with loops, and transforms himself into a one-man band. Stonehill, as much comedian as musician, gets the sillies out with "Shut de Do.'" He also sings a wonderful new blues song, "Spirit Walk," which includes the lines, "The way things are these days/Even Ray Charles can see the writing on the wall." This time, however, he is clearly not joking. The two harmonize together on "Save the Children," illustrating Compassion Intl's urgent mission to feed the hungry. [CANDLELIGHT CONCERTS] DAN MACINTOSH

ALL SAVED FREAK BAND
HARPS ON WILLOWS

I'm old enough to know of historical contributions and am intimately aware of the pain involved in pioneering past the arrows of mistrust, deceit and flat-out prejudice. When an artist forges a new path or travels on sacred ground not previously trod, he or she sows seeds of sorrow, fertilized with the tears of dashed dreams and unfulfilled longings. Like the great Larry Norman, who will be championed like a saint following his death, yet hasn't received the real-time praise he's earned, some people are dealt the low-blow of public ignorance, pining away in obscurity. These folks, like the worn out janitor at my local chapel, will only be praised when they exit this mortal coil, where they will be praised by the toughest and most honest critic of all – the King of Kings. "Well done" will be all Old Leatherface needs to hear. Now, I know that many of the pierced kids out there will look at this collection of All Saved Freak Band songs and dismiss it as "totally gay hippie rock," but that's like the disjointed fisherman giving up over the still waters where a thousand laughing fish lie underneath. It's your loss, kids. [HIDDEN VISION] KERN COUNTRY KID, THE

BENEATH THE SKY
WHAT DEMONS DO TO SAINTS

From the legendary Victory Records label comes another Christian hardcore/metalcore band. This one has really intense and high-end black metal style screaming from Joey Nelson, with a little accenting/help from bassist Nick Scarberry. The twin guitars of Jeff Nelson and Chris Profitt bring that wall of crunch that is boosted tremendously by the double bass drumming of Brandon Sowder. Evidence of the keytar-playing Matt Jones is hard to find, as his role seems secondary to pummeling the listener with metal ... at least until the sing-alongs come with the "clean voice," and then the keys add some nice dynamics and fullness. There is potential controversy in the lyrics, with some songs (like the suitably named "Goodfellas") passing judgment ("...you get what you f-ing deserve") and more Joe Peschi-like dialog in "A Grave Mistake" ("I'll take your f-ing name / All the way to the G-damn grave") and then a presentation of the Gospel in "The Reason" ("He gave his son to us ... He died for our sins to be forgiven / This trust I adore"). Conflicted lyrics aside, hearing this music – even with its similarities to Atreyu and 40 other bands – just might bring to mind the first time you heard Nodes, Sinai, ore Weyandt. Innovative? Not much. Solid? You bet. [VICTORY] DOUG VAN PELT

APOLOGETIX
WORDPLAY

The ApologetiX modus operandi in synopsis for newbies to the band:Scripture-teaching spoofs of general market hits of the past couple years prior to any album release and oldies renowned enough to probably be karaoke fodder. After a hiatus wherein the Pittsburgh parodists issued acoustic, live and best-of projects, *Wordplay* signals a rejuvenation for the band. Much of that vigor can be placed on the shoulders of new drummer Jimmy Turner, who tightens up the group's garage/bar band (if they played taverns) charms considerably. Singer J. Jackson's satire sounds to have sharpened plenty as well. He transforms a couple of the hornier country smashes since '04 – by Big & Rich and Trace Adkins – into theologicaly solid treatises and gets all up in Charles Darwin's grill with his take on Kanye West's Ray Charles fetish. Generally speaking, the older the tune ApologetiX takes on, the better they do at reinventing it. What they do with Steve Miller, Stevie Wonder, Joe Walsh and The Beatles kicks copious booty, even if they strain the Fab Four's rhyme scheme some. No slouches are they either when assaying current radio rockers such as Velvet Revolver and Nickelback. Though hearing them produced by someone outside the band could produce potentially revelatory results, self-contained indie success becomes ApologetiX's homemade ethic well enough. And it's particularly well executed here. [INDEPENDENT] JAMIE LEE RAKE

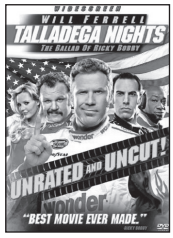
P.O.D.
GREATEST HITS (THE ATLANTIC YEARS)

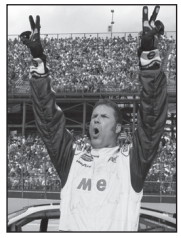
Whenever a decent-selling band leaves a label, expect a greatest hits package. The surprise here is that it features the imprint of another Warner/Elektra/Atlantic label – Rhino. Like hearing a friend's mixtape or playlist, it's interesting to hear another opinion on a band's "essential" material. The decision-makers hit most of the right tunes here (like the coup of a collaboration with Matisyahu, "Roots In Stereo," and the big hits "Alive" and "Youth Of A Nation"), and two previously-unreleased songs are pleasant surprises: the climbing midtempo "Going In Blind," which almost serves as a modern lament of the sometimes difficult life of following an invisible voice; and the driving love song (gasp!) "Here We Go." Well-written liner notes and quality packaging make this a valuable addition to the killer P.O.D. catalog. [RHINO] DOUG VAN PELT

LOST OCEAN
S/T

It's always exciting to discover a new young band filled with such genuine promise. By combining the names of two of their songs, a quartet of early twentysomethings became Lost Ocean amongst the vast crop fields and oil derricks in their hometown of Bakersfield, CA. But perhaps it was the ability to see the stars every night in their rural locale that inspired them to create something so remarkably sincere as their debut album. Unapologetically coming off as aspiring apprentices of Copeland's Aaron Marsh, guitarist/vocalist Jeff Gray and pianist Skyler Johnson delicately alternate tranquil soars that dwindle away into their bandmate's collective rock envelopment. But by acting as a moving wall of sound with enough depth to inspire a long walk through a hard rain, they affirm that with faith there's always something worth to continue for. [CREDENTIAL] DAN FRAZIER

Entertainment reviews
DVDS, BOOKS & GEAR





01 TALLADEGA NIGHTS
SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

If someone were to write "the definitive spoof on Southern USA life," this movie might be it. The grace-praying scene, where Ricky Bobby (Will Ferrell) addresses "dear Baby Jesus" and his wife corrects him is an awesome commentary on theology. "Hey, you know, sweetie... Jesus did grow up. You don't have to always call Him 'baby.' It's odd and off-putting to pray to a baby." And he opens his eyes to retort: "Well, I like the Christmas Jesus best and I'm saying grace. When you say grace, you can say it to grownup Jesus, teenage Jesus or bearded Jesus or to whomever you want ... Dear Tiny Jesus, with Your golden-fleece diapers, with your tiny, little, fat, balled-up fists pawing at the air..." His father-in-law, Grandpa Chip, interrupts with: "He was a man. He had a beard." His friend Cal Naughton Jr prefers a Jesus "in a tuxedo t-shirt, because it says, 'I wanna be formal, but I'm here to party, too.' I like to party, so I like my Jesus to party." Bobby's sons picture Jesus as a ninja, fighting off evil samurai." He finishes grace with a thanks for all his money, an endorsement of Powerade and, "Thank You for all Your power and Your grace, dear baby God. Amen." Cal affirms Ricky with, "That was a hell of a grace, man. You nailed that like a split hog!" After touching fists, Ricky says, "I'm not going to lie to you. It felt good." Now *that* is worth watching a few times! The rest of the movie doesn't let down, as one carefully-written scene after another is pulled off with the kind of oddball skill that must've had 'em guffawing seconds after the director yelled "Cuy-yit!" *Doug Van Pelt*

02 GENE SIMMONS FAMILY JEWELS *A&E HOME VIDEO*
The batman from Kiss stars in his own reality show, the best part of which occurs on couch interviews, where family members comment on their dad. Whether its meddling in his son's band or grieving over his daughter's development into adulthood, we see Gene vulnerable and whipped. *DV*

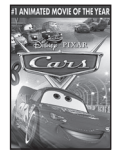
03 THE DAVINCI CODE *SPHE*
It does a fair job of re-telling the suspense from the novel, thanks to the actors and immaculate settings of Paris and London. Author Dan Brown gets an unhindered platform (the bonus disc) to proselytize via multiple featurettes, but his funky ideas fortunately aren't dogmatically fed to the viewer. *DV*

04 INVINCIBLE *DISNEY DVD*
From *Rock Star* to *Invincible*, Mark Wahlberg is like the perfect actor to portray a fantasy-come-true character. This heart-warming football/underdog story is not unlike the movie *Rocky*, which was also filmed in Philadelphia. The commentary with the real Vince Papale added a lot to the story, too. *DV*

05 NACHO LIBRE *PARAMOUNT*
The Mormon-raised maker of *Napoleon Dynamite* (Jared Hess) is really good at crafting clean yet menacing humor. Jack Black is funny enough just wearing the stretchy pants, but the deadpan portrayal of his wacky character is just about classic. The behind-the-scenes singing and goofing is funny, too. *DV*

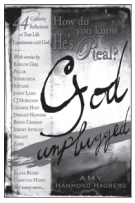
06 THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA *FOX VIDEO*
This cute lil' flick immersed in the maddening universe of constant magazine deadlines, people-pleasing, and cursed materialism also lifts the curtain of the glitzy fashion world. Andrea Sachs wrestles with success, selling out and the value of relationships. Oh, and Streep plays an almost likeable Satan. *DV*

07 CRISS ANGEL MINDFREAK SEASON TWO *A&E*
This magician friend of Klayton Scott (Circle of Dust) does an amazing job of wowing his audience (whether it's the camera/tv audience or a sidewalk/restaurant crowd). Very engaging and people friendly, he teaches parlor tricks but doesn't reveal any clues about his mind-blowing illusions/stunts. Killer. *DV*



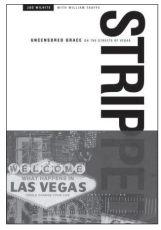
08 CARS *DISNEY DVD*
The Pixar machine scores another high mark with this cornball but lovable look into the national pasttime known as NASCAR. Owen Wilson's voice as Lightning McQueen captures that balance between resistance and compliance, as he helps tell the tale of smalltown values vs. "progress." *DV*

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
SPIRITUAL RELEVANCY (%)	100	50	100	40	90	50	40	50
OBSCENITIES	19	5	4			7	5	
SCENES OF GORE			1					
NUDITY / SEXUALITY		4	2			1		



God Unplugged
Amy Hammond Hagberg – Destiny Image

Get past the nonsensical subtitle (*How Do You Know He's Real?: God Unplugged*), and you have Amy Hammond Hagberg's second collection of celebrity auto-biographical/testimonial sketches. Christian beauty pageant winners, pop/rock musicians (mostly Christian market) and athletes in sports extreme and otherwise tell their stories of varying degrees of debauchery and sinfulness before their conversions. And the difference the Lord has made in their regenerate lives, of course. To bolster this approach to apologetics for unbelieving readers and encouragement to the saints who pick it up, Hammond Hagberg includes a scriptural epilogue after each chapter. A few of the chapters look to be repeats from her first, *How Do I Know He's Real?*; but the solicitation at book's end for readers' stories portends future less celeb-centric editions. Yay for that, a slight boo to Hammond Hagberg's emphasis on the Bible as a guidebook to a life that's happy (joyful is more the reality, and there's much difference) and best to her on compiling what could be a more spiritually specific *Chicken Soup For The Soul* -like series. *Jamie Lee Rake*



Stripped
Jud Wilhite & Bill Taaffe – Multnomah

Las Vegas isn't called Sin City for nothing, but that just makes it all the cooler when Christ's salvation breaks through in a city seeped in such iniquity. Jud Wilhite has come to discover that firsthand numerous times as a pastor there. Journalists Bill Taaffe and Wilhite tell a few stories of spiritual transformation amid pronounced darkness in *Stripped*, and per its subtitle (*Uncensored Grace on the Streets of Las Vegas*), some of the tales are more uncensored than others. For instance, there's the married couple who struggle with their roles in one of the racier dance shows on the Strip even after their regeneration. If that's a tad eyebrow-raising, other accounts of radically changed lives offer more traditionally played out conversion narratives. Wilhite and Taaffe culminate their joyous expose with the detailed tableau of a saintly cop's shooting and its after effect for the Kingdom. Leave it to the Lord to sew together His remnant people from the most unlikely sources and circumstances. *Stripped* evidences that truth in the here and now in a page-turner packed with human drama and holy intervention. *Jamie Lee Rake*

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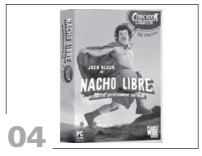

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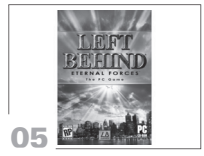

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Gadgets
Logi-Tech, Cannery Games, Planet Wide Games, & Left Behind Games

(01) Logi-Tech's **Z-10 Interactive Speaker System** ($149) is an easy & quick setup for the computer, using two speakers to deliver a pretty full sound. The touch-screen controls don't even require an actual touch(!), as a hovering finger can power off, increase volume, etc. As a stand-alone set, they can boom your iPod's tunes, too. (02) L-T's **Harmony 880 Advanced Universal Remote** ($249) is a lifesaver. We replaced 8 remotes with this one, and the setup was as easy as entering model numbers in the computer. The intuitive help feature comes in handy solving problems, knowing which functions need fixing. The battery power gets used fast, but it features a nice charger that fixes that. (03) **Who Rules? Almighty Edition** ($19) is a multi-level DVD trivia game, mixing cCm and biblical knowlege. (04) **Comic Creator** ($19) came loaded on the *Nacho Libre* DVD. It allows you to customize panels, and print your own comic. (05) The **Left Behind PC Game** ($39) factors in things like prayer and community to increase power in this action/adventure game ... and the graphics actually don't suck! *DV*

[logitech.com, cannerygames.com, mycomicbookcreator.com leftbehindgames.com]

The Christian & Art

WITH KEMPER CRABB

The Disconnect: Why Evangelicals Make Bad Art (Part the Fourth)

In the last issue, we continued to explore the question of why, in an America in which between one-fourth and one-fifth of the populace reportedly profess to be Evangelical Christians, there is such a marked relative scarcity of quality art created by Christians (in the fields of music, film, dance, television, etc.). We have seen that, though Evangelicals claim to know and love the Creator of all beauty, and to be directed by His Word in "every good work" (2 Timothy 3: 16-17) (which includes the Arts), their failure as a community to produce quality art for the Church and the world is in many ways due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Two reasons were given for this lack of knowledge: laziness and bad theology. The first of these reasons we saw as primarily related to a self-idolatry which manifests itself in a pursuit of pleasure (personal peace and affluence) which has displaced love and service to God's Will and Purposes.

The second reason, bad theology, we saw as being partially the result of jettisoning the ethical demands of Scripture for men to serve His Purposes in favor of seeking an emotional experience of God instead. Since it isn't necessary to know much Scripture to be able to seek a feel-good experience of God, study (or even basic knowledge) of the Bible has drastically fallen off amongst Evangelicals.

In point of fact, Evangelical Christians of this experientialist stripe (which seems, unfortunately, a probable majority of us) only study enough of the Bible to theoretically protect themselves from going to Hell, sickness, or poverty, or to " prosper" themselves (confess and possess, as the saying goes…). In these cases, Scripture becomes little more than a collection of magical formulas which, mixed with what is thought of as faith, can influence or force God to fulfill the desires of the Christian (of course, those who look at Scripture in this way do spend a good deal of time seeking proof-texts to demonstrate that God exists primarily to fulfill their desires, a quest which is generally mixed with "promptings" or "leadings," generally attributed to the Holy Spirit, which providentially coincide with the desires of the Christian "claiming" Scripture…).

The problem with the Scripture-as-magic formula approach, of course, is that, rather than trying to discern God's Will for men, Scripture is seen primarily as a way of influencing God to fulfill man's desire for, again, personal peace (or ecstatic experience) and affluence. Scripture is searched only to the extent that it serves these selfish ends, and is understood only in the context of how it can be distorted to manipulate God.

Rather than seeing God's Word as the Heavenly Blueprint of God's Prescribed Patterns for men's lives, as that which prepares and guides the man of God for "every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and studying it deeply to understand God's View of Himself, mankind, and the world He has made, in order to fulfill His Purposes in our lives, the Christian who only seeks his own pleasure in the attempt to control God by His Scripture is limited to surface (and in many ways, erroneous) views of Scripture, God, reality, and of himself as a person.

The irony in all this is that it is only in subjecting ourselves to God's Purposes for us that men ever truly find security, freedom, or personal peace. In any attempt to control or coerce God for the fulfillment of our own self-generated desires, we ultimately forfeit true peace and security.

The truth of the matter is that we need a knowledge of Scripture to even be able to accurately assess our experience in the world; the deeper and truer our grasp of Biblical Truth, the more accurate our assessment of life is. Without such an accurate assessment of our experience, it is impossible to fulfill the vocations God has designed for us (including that of the artist). To this topic we will, Lord willing, turn in the next issue.

[kempercrabb.net]

The way I see it
Chris Wighaman

I just got an email from a friend I haven't talked to in 2 years and, as we began to chat, I found that we picked up right where we left off, as if no time had passed. I thought of all the things we'd been through, all the history we'd shared: arguing over pickup game fouls, backpacking through Colorado, discussing what it means to follow Jesus, being in each other's weddings, and "the flaming roll" [wait, I have to explain that one. He tried to dry out a roll of paper towels, which he had dropped in the toilet, by putting it in the microwave – only to have them burst into flames when the microwave door was opened. Strange, it was almost as if he'd done this before, but was expecting different results this time. The best/worst part was that as he frustratedly pulled the flaming roll out of the microwave and threw it into MY room as I yelled and stomped it out].

Even though time may pass, it really is amazing how some bonds made are not easily broken. Why? I'd have to say because we were and are friends like the friends Jesus describes in John 15: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." This kind of friendship, or – what might be even a better word – community, is rare. It comes through time, effort, patience, and love. It's this community that defined the followers of The Way in the book of Acts. But what about now? Can it really exist in the here and now? Can we find friends we would lay our lives down for, that we would sell things for to help them out, people who would help us work through the struggles and problems in our lives? If we allow Christ to work in us and through us with the people all around us, it is possible to develop the Christ-centered community that is real and lasts. You see it was because Christ first befriended those first disciples that they were willing to die for each other. It was through His love that they were able to sell their possessions in order to take care of each other. When we allow Christ to call us friend, and are willing to throw ourselves completely into it, then we can begin to experience His community with those around us who have too. Where do we find these people? Well, I like the way Matt Turner says it in his book *Provocative Faith*, "Community is not found in the nameless faces of the great army of God, spread throughout history, but in the individual men and women you've fought side by side with, the people whose faces bear the scars they took when they defended you from the enemy, the people who've seen you limp and struggle and even fall and who pulled you back up out of the mud. Your platoon, your company, your friends; the people who pray for you and struggle with you and always watch your back. Ah, yes, that's community."

Devotions
with Greg Tucker

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.
–Romans 6:23

Recently I was in the terminal of a New York City airport with ten hours to kill between flights. Having just sat for five hours on the first plane – and with twice that yet to go on the next – what I really wanted was to get outside and walk. An investment of $13 delivered me to the middle of Times Square, and my adventure began.

If you've ever been to Manhattan, you know that virtually every car is either black or yellow, a dichotomy that illustrates one difference in our society. Wealthy and famous people ride in sleek, chauffeur-driven limousines on leather seats and luxurious black carpet. Simply by stepping inside, the individual is declaring, "It's nothing but the best for me. My future is brimming with promise and excitement." In contrast, the every-day Joe simply hails a cab. Germ-filled, and usually with ad space for rent on its roof, there is never a hint of promise or excitement. There is no carpet.

I know a man who was flown to New York City to appear as a guest on a Jerry Springer kind of show. Seems his youthful indiscretions were catching up with him, and unbeknownst to him he was about to be confronted on national television.

Everyone begged him not to go, but this guy was excited. "The studio is sending a limousine to my house to deliver me to the airport," he bragged. "A limousine!" When the highly-polished vehicle arrived, he posed for the camera, thumbs up and all smiles.

Once in New York, the show went the way it always does. The audience loved seeing my friend squirm and then break down as his regretful past was aired for everyone to see. At one point the TV camera captured a look on his face that said it all: "What on earth am I doing here?" But here's the kicker. When his plane landed, there was no well-mannered driver in a black suit waiting to deliver him home. The show provided him with taxi fare instead.

Never be blind to the reality of sin. It will pick you up in a limo and send you home in a cab every single time. The hope that breaking God's law will somehow end up as a good thing may make sense on the front end, but there is always a "rest of the story" that includes guilt, shame, or regret. Always. God's promises are true, and your future really is brimming with "promise and excitement" by choosing daily to walk with Him.

[Greg Tucker lives in your computer at HopeCCA.com]

PICK OF THE LITTER

After The Sirens

This band from Boston, MA has crafted an epic with the 11-song album, *What I Have To Give, Let It Be Enough*. Vocalist Ryan Heidorn is really supported by his band (Thomas Deyesso on guitar/keys; Ryan Hussey on guitar/vocals; Jonny Misarski on bass; and Jason Lefever on drums). The songs here span enough range to be interesting, yet cohesive enough to form an identifiable sound. For band comparisons, there could be many, but Anberlin would not be far off. This band seems to have it all: cool melodies, well placed and well played instrumentation, songs that you want to sing along to, artwork/packaging, and lyrics worth checking out. "Sieves and Seizures" proclaims: "I used to speak in the tongues of angels, all I ever say now is goodbye / And I'll set myself on fire as a beacon through the shadow that my life has been, but I would only smolder, because I would not burn for anyone when I had the chance." The haunting screaming in the background during the tail end of "The Lights At Nero's Party" conjure the multi-layering of Underoath. (Doug Van Pelt)
afterthesirens.com

FreeSlave

It's quite a joy to see/hear the development of this artist over time. Haydon Spenceley writes and sings some smooth modern rock that's not too distant from The Fray at times. His melodies are "smart" and make sense. Very pop, mostly solid and fairly consistent. (DV)
freeslave.org.uk

The New Frontiers

fka Stellamaris, this melodic modern rock band is smooth, with real clean guitars accompanied by a voice that you can really enjoy for one pleasant listen after another (like the romping melody and "ba da da da da's" found in the song "Walking On Stones"). (DV)
thisisstellamaris.com

Oblio

With smooth, comfy vocals and a nice mix of organic instruments and odd sound bytes (like outdoor crickets) and a little Cajun vibe... "Never That Cold" is a downright cool song. "Marlborough Blues" has that cool, dreamy atmosphere not too unlike Viva Voce. (DV)
obliomusic.com

Altera Enigma

This is a fun side project for some very technically proficient musicians, who happen to live in different parts of the world. *Alteration* was put together with the aid of modern technology. It could be described as both Jazz Fusion and Progressive Metal. Most of it's instrumental, with great noodling and shredding, but there is one deathy/growl song ("Relating The Transformation") and some foreign language in another ("Pasivitas Sudut Pandang"). It's no wonder that Altera Enigma is the brainchild of former Paramaecium guitarist Jason De Ron and Kekal's Jefray Arwadi. Very cool and even surprising stuff. (DV)
alteraenigma.com

Cries Hannah

While their name is misleading, the output is prolific. This intense sounding band keeps chugging the metal line, but throws variation into songs by singing, strumming and settling down for a moment before they burst forth with screaming energy again. (DV)
crieshannah.com

Gabriel's Path

While their name might sound like another youth group pop band, this quartet from Phoenix is acidic and brutal extreme metal. Unrelenting, creative, and really intense. I love it! (DV)
myspace.com/gabrielspath

Counting Heartbeats

These Canucks put out some great melodic rock that's filled with strong hooks and great vocals. Modern but in touch with tastier moments from new wave, early NYC punk, and even the off-kilter vocal delivery of mewithoutYou. (DV)
countingheartbeats.com

The Rider On The White Horse

Here's some very lovely and brutal black metal. At times the climbing bass runs remind me of Mortification. (DV)
myspace.com/therideronthewhitehorse

Sealed By Blood

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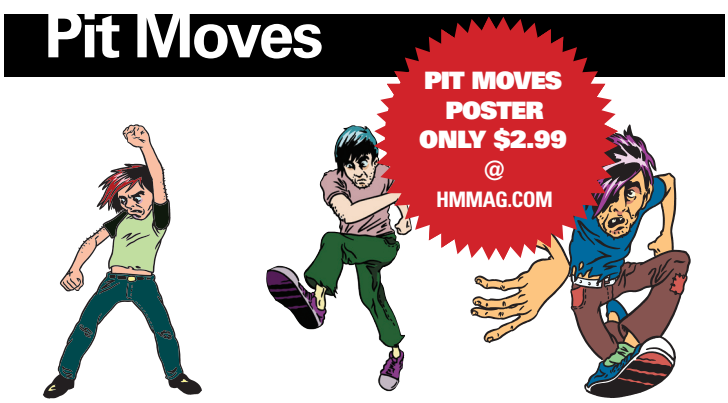
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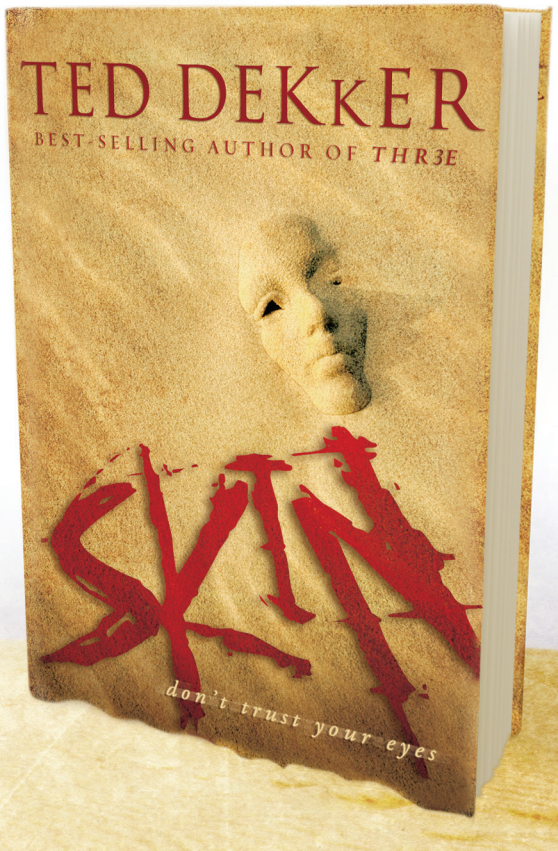

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